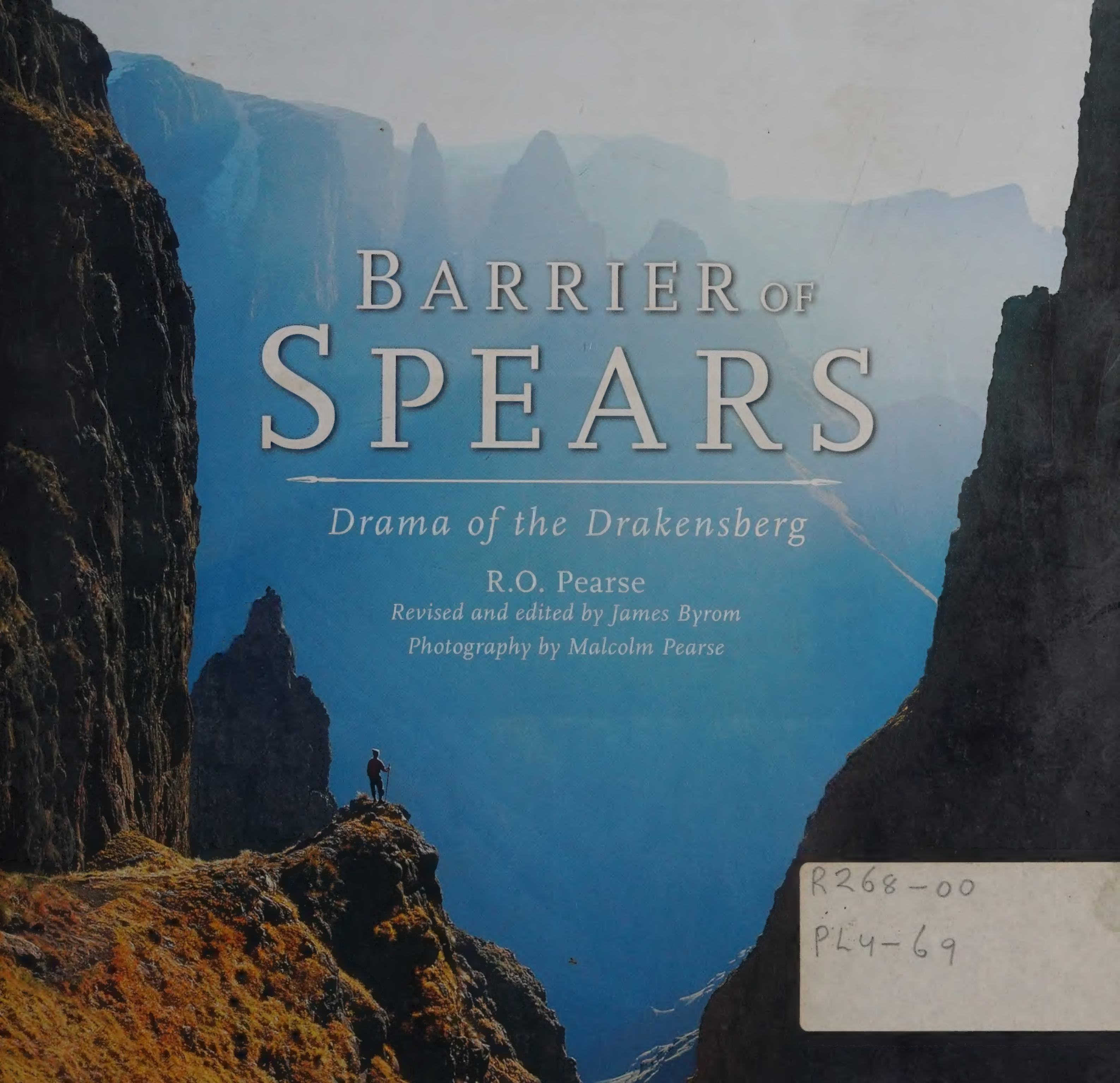

BARRIER OF SPEARS

Drama of the Drakensberg

R.O. Pearse

Revised and edited by James Byrom

Photography by Malcolm Pearse

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Somewhere through the mists of time Zulus looked at the Drakensberg mountain range with its jagged spires and, in their poetic language, called it *uKhahlamba*...the Barrier of Spears.

In this South African classic, Reg Pearse tells the full story of this timeless mountain world. The reader will meet men and women who climbed its high peaks, who fought, worked and played on its slopes, and who lived and died in its shadow.

The story, written by a master of language, is set against a backdrop of ever-changing beauty, where wild flowers paint the green hillsides, where untamed creatures of the wild roam the mountain slopes, and where great birds, in silent majesty, patrol the corridors of the sky.

Since *Barrier of Spears* was first published in 1973 there have been considerable moves towards conservation of the Drakensberg — most of it is now a World Heritage Site. The intervening years have seen advances in knowledge, scientific names have changed, and management and its criteria have been radically altered. All these developments are incorporated by James Byrom in this fully revised edition.

The brilliant photographic skills of Malcolm Pearse permit the reader to relish the stunning beauty of the Drakensberg, while a host of old, historic pictures introduce characters of yesteryear and allow a reliving of times and places gone by.

Who was Reg Pearse? The answer is given in a pen portrait, included in *Barrier of Spears* for the first time, of the man who understood and loved the mountains like few men have ever done.

More than 30 years ago the *Mountain Club of South Africa Journal* described *Barrier of Spears* as "more than a book. It is a monument". We are sure you will agree!

Malcolm Pearse

In memory of my climbing companions down the years

BARRIER OF SPEARS

Drama of the Drakensberg

R.O. PEARSE

Revised and edited by James Byrom
Photography by Malcolm L Pearse *et al.*

Produced by Art Publishers (Pty) Ltd
Durban, Johannesburg, Cape Town

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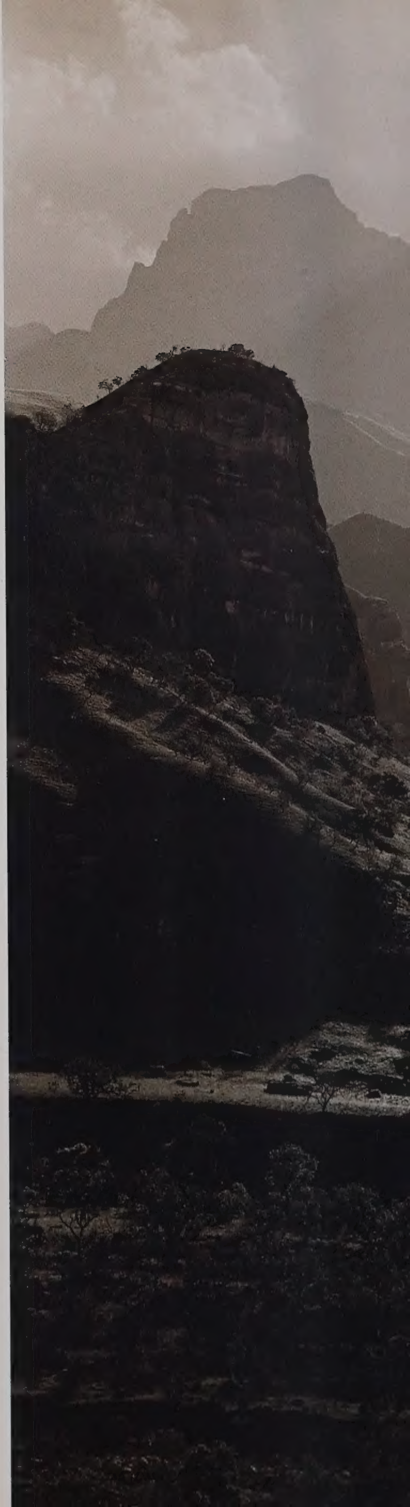
First published 1973

Cover photography - Readers of the first edition of Barrier of Spears will recognise Malcolm Pearse's brilliant photograph of the Mnweni Pass used on the cover of this edition. The format of that edition was a vertical rectangle, while this edition the format is square. Fortunately this book has brought together two of the finest Drakensberg photographers of all time: Malcolm Pearse and John Hone. The new cover photograph was given the extra width needed by digitally "stitching" Malcolm's original photograph into one taken from the same spot by John Hone.

WITH APPRECIATION

"I have enjoyed writing this book, not the least of its pleasures being the many charming people I have met who responded so willingly and so generously to my requests for information," R.O. Pearse wrote when he acknowledged the help he had been given with the first edition of Barrier of Spears. More than 30 years and two more editions have passed since then, and the list has grown to an unmanageable size — almost a full chapter in itself! However, in deciding to omit the list, let it be said that without the memories and anecdotes of a great number of people down the years this book would never have been written, never have been revised and revised again. Most of those who spoke of the early days in the Drakensberg, those pioneer farming families, hoteliers and climbers, have passed on. They will be remembered with gratitude and their memorials will be the stories they told. Those who have helped me gather facts and volunteered information for this new edition will know that they have contributed to keeping alive a wonderful and vitally important publication. For this they have my heartfelt thanks. - JB



"When my eldest boy was eight years old he went with his mother up the North ridge of Tryfan on a day when a wild Westerly was driving cloud and soft rain over the ridge. They were alone, and on a ledge near the top when he stopped and said thoughtfully: 'Mummy, these are the wild and lonely places'."

Charles Evans, in his Valedictory Presidential Address to the Alpine Club, 7 December 1970

Malcolm Pearse

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PREFACE

This book was first published in 1973. In 1984 the publishers, Howard Timmins, went into liquidation, and for five years the book was out of print. By the time the book was republished in 1989 much new knowledge about the Drakensberg had accumulated, changes had taken place, new thinking on the control of the Drakensberg had emerged and a few small errors in the first edition had to be corrected.

The Drakensberg Range forms the eastern escarpment of South Africa. It is actually a mountain chain of some 960 km in length. In the north it separates the Transvaal Lowveld from the Highveld, and, commencing at about Lat. 23°, runs south to Laing's Nek, at the point where the three provinces, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Free State, meet. From that point it swings south-west, forming the boundary between KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State. At Mont-aux-Sources it turns south-east, and forms the boundary between KwaZulu-Natal and Lesotho, veering south-west again at Giant's Castle. Soon after this it enters the Cape, and gradually merges into the Stormberg Mountains.

Barrier of Spears limits itself to the 95 km between Mont-aux-Sources and Giant's Castle, with only occasional references to those portions lying north and south of this stretch. Here it is at its finest, the average height being 3 050 m, and the highest peaks rising to over 3 350 m. North and south of this area, especially north, it is nothing like so impressive.

Naming of the Drakensberg

How the name Drakensberg, meaning Dragon Mountains, came to be given is not known. It was in use well before the Voortrekkers came to Natal in 1837. In those early days it was sometimes spelt "Drakenberg", sometimes "Draaksberg", while a map published in 1847 by James Wyld, Geographer to the Queen, calls it "Drache Berg or Quathlamba Mountains". By 1850, however, the present spelling of Drakensberg appears to have been well established, though it is interesting to note that 90 per cent of the mapmakers of the nineteenth century used the Zulu name Quathlamba for the range.

Two quite reputable publications have made claims to the origin of the name, both of which are incorrect. The eleventh edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, published in 1910, says: "The Draken's Berg, the particular hill from which the range was named ... lies between Malani and Inkwelo Heights. It was so named by the Voortrekkers about 1840." This is not so. The Voortrekkers knew the name in 1837. There is no such place as Malani in the Newcastle area (it could be an error for Mont Pelaan, 40 km west of Dannhauser). Between Mont Pelaan and Inkwelo Heights there certainly is a "Drakensberg", but this is merely the official name of the trigonometrical survey beacon given in 1881.

In his book *Southern Africa* Vol 1, published in 1955, John H. Wellington, Professor of Geography at the University of the Witwatersrand at the time, says the range was named after a peak called Drakensberg, or Dragon's Rock, 48 km west of Matatiele. But again, this is simply the name of a trigonometrical survey beacon on the farm Drakensrock in the Mount Currie district. The farm Drakensrock 93 was only laid out and named in 1892, and the trigonometrical beacon built and named in 1909.

The earliest date in which I have been able to find the name Drakensberg recorded is 1834. In that year Dr Andrew Smith passed through the eastern Free State on his way up to Central Africa. He was accompanied by a celebrated artist, Charles Bell. Two of his paintings feature the name Drakensberg, and both are dated 1834.

In that year Piet Uys and his "Kommissie Trek" Boers visited Natal. On their return to the Cape they visited the Underberg and Himeville areas and travelled south along the flanks of the southern Drakensberg, crossing the upper reaches of the emKhmozi (Umkomaas), emZimvubu (Umzimvubu) and emZimkhulu (Umzimkulu) rivers. I believe it quite possible that it was they who named the Drakensberg.

I have devoted three chapters to the Langalibalele "Rebellion", and to the action of 4 November 1873 on the summit of the Drakensberg. Apart from several widely accepted errors which I wished to clear up, this is a story of matchless endurance and courage (and of bitter shame), which deserves to be told in full and recorded. It has never been told fully before, and of course it had a profound influence on events in South Africa, and, to a lesser extent, overseas as well.

R.O.P.
"Emkhizweni"
Winterton,
Natal
June 1989

Footnote to Preface:

The last edition of *Barrier of Spears*, published by Southern Book Publishers, appeared more than 15 years ago and, once again, the text has had to be carefully revised to ensure that changes in the Drakensberg are recorded and the brought up to date.

In earlier editions of this book the Anglicised versions of Zulu names were used as it was felt that readers would identify with them more easily than with the correct Zulu names. However, the correct spellings of several names have come into general usage in recent years, so I have decided that these should be used.

The enduring success of Reg Pearse's *Barrier of Spears* lies in the manner in which it was written. Reg was a story teller without equal and the pictures he drew with words allowed readers to see and dream about sunsets and storms, animals and flowers, hidden valleys with cool streams and lonely spires. He deeply loved the mountains, and for this reason changes to his text have been kept to a minimum, being mostly updating facts or deleting information that is no longer relevant.

The changing economics of printing, however, have demanded that the book be shortened slightly, and to achieve this it was decided to omit the Foreword to the first edition by S.P. Botha, then Minister of Forestry, the Foreword to the second edition by Dr George R. Hughes, former Director of the Natal Parks Board, and not to seek a Foreword for this edition. An appendix on the historical maps of the Drakensberg, and another on climbing techniques, have also been omitted as it was felt the information was either too specialised for the general reader or easily available elsewhere.

My deepest wish is that the reader of this edition will find the revised text seamless and in the spirit of Reg's original work.

James Byrom
Silsden
West Yorkshire
October 2006

PRELUDE

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

For some reason my pipe was not drawing properly. But that did not matter. I was sitting in my deck chair, on the lawns of Emkhizweni, our new home. Over to the left the plane trees were just beginning to turn brown. To the right, a single liquidambar tree flamed in a blaze of red and gold. In front, soaring up into the clouds, was Cathkin Peak, and I watched it slowly turning from the translucent blue of afternoon to the deep purple of twilight. Suddenly, as the sun began to set over Hlatikhulu Nek, a blazing sword struck sharply and obliquely through the gap between Cathkin and Sterkhorn, and the rocks of Wostyn glowed for a brief moment with a gold that rivalled the gold of the liquidambar. Then it was gone. The night was coming.

It was autumn, 1966. Five months previously the farewells had been said after my 25 years as Headmaster of a large co-educational high school, our boxes had been packed, we had torn up the roots of many years, and had headed for our new home, Emkhizweni, the Place of the Misty Rain, in the foothills of the Drakensberg. Over those 25 years I had grown to love the mighty Drakensberg mountains, for we could see their blue spires from the front door of our home in the school grounds, and access to them was easy. In fair weather and wild storm I had roamed the pleasant valleys of the Little Berg, climbed in the rugged High Berg, and slept among the peaks, sometimes on snowclad slopes. And when the inevitable prospect of retirement had loomed up, and I knew I would have to leave the school I had loved, what more natural home for myself and my wife than the Drakensberg. Five years before we were due to go we had bought a six-hectare plot on the slopes of Wostyn, in the Cathkin area, with one of the most wonderful views I have ever seen. For five years we had spent our holidays there, in our caravan, slowly converting wild and virgin veld (there was not a single tree on it when we bought it) into a pleasant garden. Slowly, over the years, we had imposed some sort of order on the rolling slopes and the wild grasses. Terraces were levelled and grassed, trees planted, a swimming bath built, and finally had come the white walls of our home and the bright flame of the bougainvilleas clambering over them.

Now most of the work had been done, it was autumn, and we had been five months in our new home. I could relax, with a pipe and a glass of beer, and the leaves falling slowly from the autumn trees.

And in front, peer among Drakensberg peaks, Cathkin, red in the dawn, purple in the late afternoon, enigmatic, pearl-grey and aloof as the clouds built up around it, and the summer storms swept across its changing face. And on each side, though we could not see them, for they were hidden by the spurs of the Little Berg, mile upon mile of blue peaks, marching proudly in the sunlight of their million years — the mighty Drakensberg range.

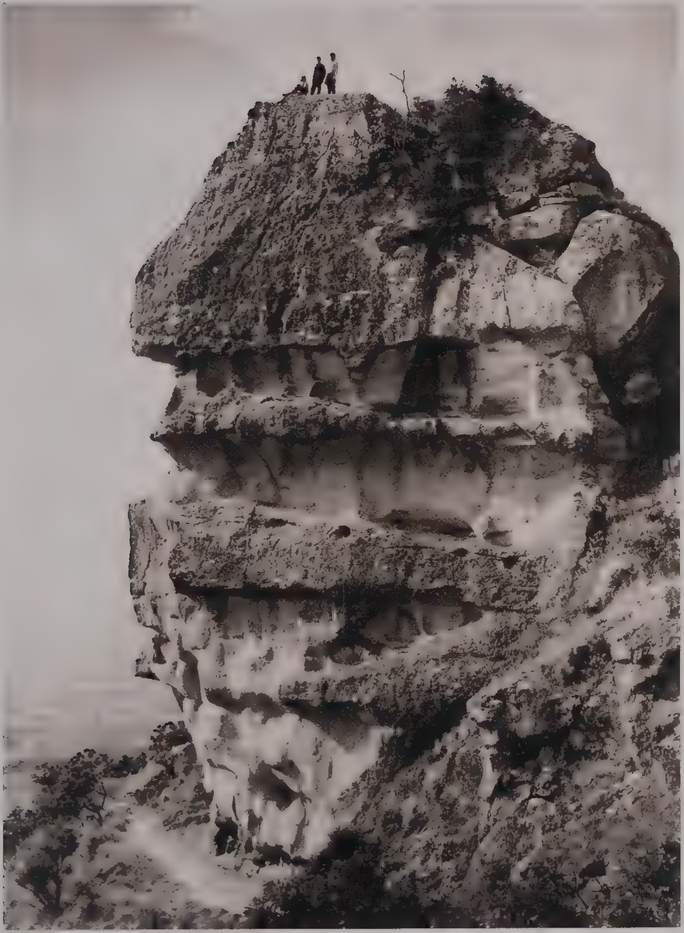
How had it all started, these enigmatic, snowcovered peaks, soaring up into the sky? What was their story, hidden in the mists of time? How had it all begun?

Actually the scientist today has a pretty shrewd idea of how it all started. Over the years he has probed, analysed, and studied the record of the rocks. He has turned his telescope to the stars, and has penetrated the depths of space, first by sight, then by radio waves, and finally, since 1969, in person (albeit by proxy) as his spaceships have taken off on the first hesitant, but breathless, journeys into the solar system. Slowly the doors of knowledge are being unlocked one by one.

But should he go still further back? Are the facts and figures of the scientist the last word, or is there an intelligence behind all this, directing, controlling, guiding?

I believe that the evidence of planned order, of inexorable law, of careful thought, of divine imagination is far too overwhelming to permit of any other explanation. I believe this vast universe, which is our home, "with its mighty throng", as the New English Bible puts it, down to the tiny gnat that buzzes round your candle flame, started as an idea in the mind of God.

And what more majestic or noble language could one find to describe those mighty cosmic events in the dawn of time than the sonorous organ



Malcolm Pearse

The Sphinx, Central Drakensberg

A typical sandstone rock feature of the foothills - 'The Sphinx' some three kilometres along the trail above Champagne Castle Hotel notes of the first chapter of Genesis. "In the beginning ... the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

"In the beginning... God."

How many countless aeons of time fled slowly by as the earth pursued its endless journey round the sun, no one knows. But eventually the earth as we know it began to emerge. We must assume that the flaming mass of gas and vapour slowly cooled to molten rock and then to vast, steaming seas of which we read in the record of the rocks. Then, strange and terrible as it must have appeared at first, the dry land began to emerge. The cooling process continued, and as the rocks cooled they contracted, and vast lateral pressures were set up, producing surface movements, so that mountains, hills and valleys began to take shape. Among the oldest known rocks in the world are granites in western Greenland. Dated by the rubidiumstrontium dating method, they are close on four billion years old.

The rocks in the Drakensberg area are much younger than this. Here the bed of the seas was made up of what is known as Natal Group Sandstone (previously known as Table Mountain Sandstone), originally laid down as a sediment on the floor of this vast ocean about 500 million years ago. As these sediments grew too heavy, they collapsed into troughs on the bed of the sea. Then lateral pressures produced a general uprising, and so the dry land appeared.

Then slowly, over a great part of what is now Central and Southern Africa, a vast lake appeared, and it is probably here, in the warm waters of this sea, as in seas elsewhere, that life first appeared. It included the area now occupied by the Drakensberg Mountains.

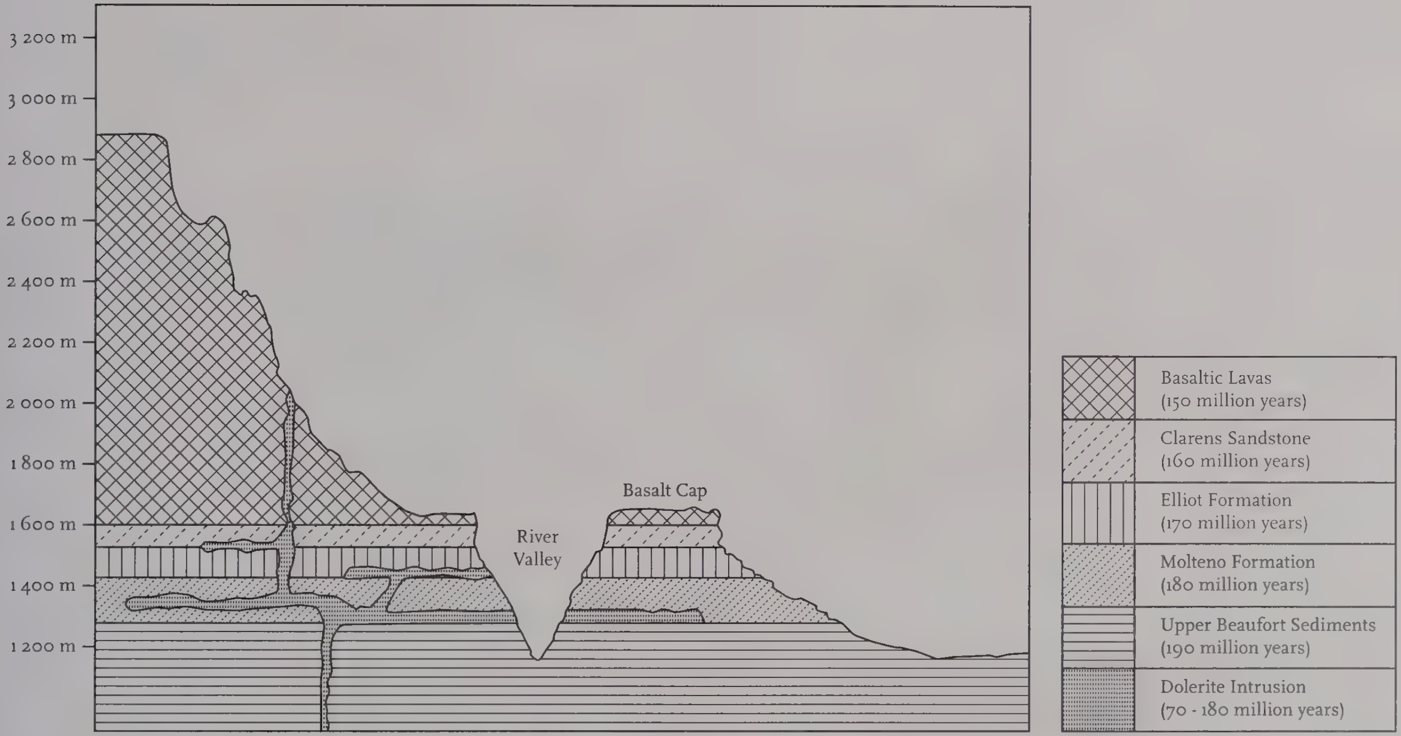
During this time Southern Africa, India, Australia, South America and Antarctica formed a vast land mass which we today call Gondwanaland, a huge continent over which climatic conditions were fairly constant.

Then the eternal erosion cycle set in. Soil was washed down from these up-thrust surrounding hills, and the Great Lake began to fill up. It became a huge marsh, a vast, steaming swamp, and it was here, as in similar swamps all over the face of the earth, that life developed. It started, from its dim beginnings, to teem, to differentiate, to breed, to struggle and toil, endlessly, ever upwards and outwards, on a journey that was to take it from the primordial slime to the stars. And to what purpose, the travail, the bitter toil, the mindless agony, the long upward surge? What was the ultimate goal? Ask of the stars, for I cannot tell you. And it matters little, for whatever the distant goal, it is the toil and the travail that counts.

Here, in this steaming marsh, plant life began to flourish. It was here that the huge reptiles of the slime floundered, and lived, and fought, and died. Some were small and some were huge inoffensive creatures, feeding on the rank vegetation; the giant ferns and cycads of the swamps. Others were fearsome creatures feeding on one another, with huge teeth and terrible jaws, ripping and tearing in the mud and slime. Monsters up to 18 m in length were not unknown. When they died their bodies sank into the mud of the Great Swamp, and the mud turned to rock, entombing the fossilised skeletons of these huge beasts for all time. Today we call these rocks, geologically, the Ecca and Beaufort Groups. You will not find them in the Drakensberg, for they have been overlaid by the basalt, the sandstone, the Elliot Formation (Red Beds) and the Molteno Formation, as we shall show. Only a few kilometres away from the High Drakensberg, however, at Bergville, Estcourt, and in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal, down to about the 600 m level, these rocks have been exposed, and it is here that traces of these primordial reptiles appear.

By this time some 8 500 m of mud and sand had accumulated in the Great Marsh. This indicates clearly that the bottom of the lake must have been slowly sinking, for no lake could have been 8 500 m deep to start with.

It is also quite clear that by now a period of steadily increasing aridity had set in. This arid period resulted directly in the formation of the Elliot and Molteno Formations, which overlaid the hardening mud of the swamp, for these coloured muds and shales — red, yellow, purple and blue — usually result from arid conditions. Today they form the lowermost strata of what geologists call the Drakensberg Formation (previously known as the Stormberg Series). This is part of the Karroo Sequence (previously known as the Karroo System). You will find these beds on the slopes of the Little Berg, between the 1 370 m and the 1 830 m levels, just below the sandstone rock bands. When we dug the holes for our fruit trees at Emkhizweni, which is at an altitude of 1 463 m, we found clear evidence of the Molteno Formation. In quite a small area deposits of yellow, red, brown, purple and blue gravels and clays were dug up. Above the Molteno Formation, on the slopes of the Little Berg, the dark, purplish-red shales of the Elliot Formation can be clearly seen,


3 200 m
3 000 m
2 800 m
2 600 m
2 400 m
2 200 m
2 000 m
1 800 m
1 600 m
1 400 m
1 200 m
Basalt Cap
River Valley
Basaltic Lavas (150 million years)
Clarens Sandstone (160 million years)
Elliot Formation (170 million years)
Molteno Formation (180 million years)
Upper Beaufort Sediments (190 million years)
Dolerite Intrusion (70 - 180 million years)

Profile of the geological structure of the Drakensberg

where erosion has stripped the slopes of their ground cover.

It was the laying down of these two drier layers, the Molteno Formation and the Elliot Formation, that spelt the end of the great reptiles. The Molteno Formation was laid down in shallow water, under climatic conditions of intermittent rainfall. Swamps were now isolated, not very extensive, and in the process of drying up. Many of the hardier reptiles lasted on into this period. But by the time the Elliot Formation was laid down, most of the swamps had gone, and so, too, had most of the reptiles.

That these huge beasts once roamed in the area now occupied by the Drakensberg is clear. They have left their footprints, and sometimes their bones, behind. Partial skeletons and portions of skulls are not uncommon. None have been found on the KwaZulu-Natal side of the Drakensberg, but they have been found in the Molteno Formation in Lesotho, notably by G.M. Stockley and Dr L.D. Boonstra. The Reverend S.S. Dornan collected dinosaurian bones of *Massospondylus* in Lesotho in 1908.

Dinosaur footprints have been frequently found in Lesotho. Reverend Dornan was the first to record these, at Tsikoane, Qalo, Morija and Teyateyaneng. Some even showed skin corrugations. At Tekoane he found more than 50 altogether, some as long as 36 cm. All were three-toed, and very clear. A set of small footprints of a small reptile has been found in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve on the KwaZulu-Natal side of the Drakensberg.

Malcolm Pearse

Malcolm Pearse

Basalt of the Drakensberg

The crumbling nature of the Drakensberg's basalt rock is evident in the picture above of the Amphitheatre wall.
Left: A view that shows the scale of the range and the extent of the volcanic activity that took place some 150 million years ago

After the Molteno and Elliot Formations had been laid down, the winds began to blow: great, howling, shrieking desert winds, such as the earth had rarely known, blowing timelessly and endlessly over these arid plains. The topmost layers of the surrounding hills were stripped off by these scything gales, carried long distances, and deposited in the form of sheets of sandstone on top of the shales of the Elliot and Molteno Formations, making a new layer. It is these sandstone rock layers, exposed now in the form of horizontal rock bands, 70 to 80 m high (on iNtaba'mhlophe they are 244 m high!) that form such a prominent feature of the Little Berg today. Predominantly cream-coloured or white, they sometimes appear pink, brown, deep red, pale blue, or grey. The sheer cliffs are often accompanied by rock pinnacles carved into fantastic shapes and sizes. This rock band is called the Clarens Sandstone Formation, previously known as Cave Sandstone because of the many caves formed in it by the faster weathering of softer layers. It is these caves, so common in the Little Berg, which delight the heart of the mountaineer today, caught out in the open with no shelter, when the storms sweep down upon him from the high peaks.

By this time, of course, the original primal vegetation, and the huge creatures of the slime had disappeared completely. The earth was drier. Smaller, hardier, more agile types of animals began to appear, as life battled for survival in the face of changing conditions. The foundation rocks of what we call today the Little Berg were being laid down, the Great Sculptor hard at work, his tools the wind and the rain, sandstone, gravel and time. The stage was being set for the world as we know it today and for the emergence of man.

One mighty cataclysm still remained before the Drakensberg that we know today could appear. The depressions, which we have already noted, formed by folding of the earth's crust, became the weakest portion of the crust. Eventually, these depressions fractured, aided perhaps by bursting pressures from below, for beneath the bed of what had been the Great Lake lay mighty, smouldering fires, kilometre upon deep kilometre of white-hot molten rock. And then with a roar that must have shaken the very heavens, these huge imprisoned forces broke free, and burst through, forcing their way between fissures in the muds and shales of the entire Karroo Sequence, roaring through the vast sheets of sandstone and pouring out on to the waiting plains. Over vast areas of land the sky steamed and flamed, accompanied by the shattering roar of the lava floods as they raced over the arid plains.

Behind it all was still the governing intelligence, the guiding will, but now the Great Sculptor had taken unto himself a new and a mighty tool!

Layer after layer of lava was laid down on top of the sandstone, hardening into basalt, varying in thickness from a few centimetres to hundreds of metres. These layers may be traced today in the basalt top of the High Drakensberg, in the highlands of Lesotho, in the eastern districts of the Orange Free State, and on into the Lebombo Range and the mountains of the eastern Transvaal. In the Drakensberg these periodic layers are particularly noticeable. They form long, horizontal rock ledges, stretching often for several kilometres, with a total thickness of between 1 220 and 1 525 m. They stand out very clearly indeed after a fall of snow. This was probably the largest eruption in the long history of the earth. Its southern limit stretched beyond Port Elizabeth, its western beyond Kimberley, its northern close to the Limpopo River, and its eastern to an unknown distance beyond the present coastline.

Today pebbles of agate are often found in the beds of most Drakensberg streams, and on the flat areas on the summits of the Little Berg. These come from this lava, and are formed in an interesting way. As volcanic material solidifies, gas bubbles are trapped in it. Mineral-rich liquids percolate through the rock and get into these holes, thus forming concentric layers of beautifully coloured agates, quartz and chalcedony. Today one can see hundreds of them in a day's walk over the Little Berg.

It was towards the end of this volcanic period that the ancient land-mass of Gondwanaland began to disintegrate. Huge sections began to break off to form Madagascar, India, Australia, Antarctica and South America. Once again the seas broke in, and made more humid conditions possible.

We have now reached this position: superimposed on top of the older rocks and the dried-out deposits of the Great Lake (Ecca and Beaufort rocks), we have, firstly, the layer we call the Molteno Formation, and above that, the softer Elliot Formation. Superimposed on this is a third layer, vast sheets of wind-blown sandstone. Lastly, there is a final capping of lava, 1 525 m thick, which we call basalt.

This vast "sandwich" covered most of what we know as South Africa — the whole of the Free State, most of the former Transvaal, the northern and central Cape, and all KwaZulu-Natal. It is known as the Karoo Sequence. It almost certainly stretched over the whole of Gondwanaland far beyond the present coastline and was probably a dreary, grim, horrifying wasteland. Gone were the lush forests, the steaming swamps, the creatures of the slime. Could any sort of life possibly have existed on these arid, burnt plains of hardening lava?

Actually, geologists tells us, some sort of life must have existed, for the evolutionary chain continued uninterrupted. Life certainly continued to flourish in the northern hemisphere, and almost certainly continued even in Gondwanaland. Evidence from the sites of modern volcanoes indicates that lava flows can be colonised by vegetation taking advantage of the enriched soils derived from ash and the lava itself. It is possible that the lava flows in Gondwanaland left islands of exposed land masses that remained uncovered, and of course marine life must have existed and was probably abundant. To be realistic, however, we must admit that we know very little about what conditions were like in South Africa during and immediately after these great outpourings of lava.

But still there was no Drakensberg.

Now, once again, the Great Sculptor took up his tools of wind and rain, of heat and cold, and the Drakensberg began to emerge. First the warm Mozambique current developed as the continental masses moved further apart, and flowed swiftly down the east coast of Natal, bringing with it masses of warm, humid air, and teeming torrents of rain. The rain poured down on to the dry, arid plains and the land was drenched with it. Eastward-flowing rivers began to erode down to the "new" sea level, aided in their development by the downwarping of the continental edge to the east, referred to as the Natal Monocline. Erosion set in, persistent, urgent. Slowly the basalt began to crumble, retreating westwards, and after it came the sandstone, swept away by the torrential floods. Sometimes harder deposits of sandstone would be left behind, and so we have Table Mountain, near Pietermaritzburg, and iNtaba'mhlophe in the Estcourt district. Professor L.C. King computed the retreat at about one and a half metres every 1 000 years. Steadily, remorselessly, through the middle and late Mesozoic periods, year after year, century after century, the slow erosion went on. The basalt moved somewhat faster than the Clarens Sandstone Formation, with the result that there are now two scarps, the basalt "High Berg" and the sandstone "Little Berg", a few kilometres apart. The escarpment has retreated about 45 cm since Van Riebeeck landed at the Cape, 6,5 m since earliest recorded history, and about 1,5 km since man made his first appearance on earth. The topography of the Drakensberg is thus substantially the same as that which the first man would have seen a million years ago[1].

Eventually, the escarpment reached its present position. The edge of the sandstone became the Little Berg, and the edge of the basalt, superimposed on top of the sandstone, became the main Drakensberg Range of today. Over southern and eastern Natal much of the Karroo Sequence rock and of the Beaufort Group was almost totally stripped off by this westward-marching erosion, and we see exposed the older, underlying formations, the Ecca Group and Dwyka Formation, and the Natal Group Sandstone. To the north and the west, however, we still have the rolling grasslands of the Beaufort and Ecca Groups, sweeping up to the sandstone-topped faces of the Little Berg, and the towering basalt cliffs of the High Drakensberg.

One important point follows from all this, which it is important to remember. There is no "other side" of the Drakensberg. When you climb to the summit from the KwaZulu-Natal side, at 3 050 m, you do not go down the other side. You are on top of a lofty undulating plateau, stretching westwards far into Lesotho.

All this time, patiently, timelessly, the Great Sculptor worked away at the face of the Drakensberg. In gentle mood he carved the lovely valleys of the Little Berg, and caused the rivers to flow softly through them, and the grass to grow, and the forests to take shape. And still the rains poured down, but gently now; from the valleys came the sound of many waters; the rich, black earth, deep with humus, began to appear, and the wild animals and the flowers of the high places found there a home.

In sterner mood he carved, above the Little Berg, the mighty face of the Drakensberg itself. Isolated peak upon peak, deeply-etched channels, tremendous gorges, dark eerie chasms, knifelike ridges, minarets, towers, citadels, began to appear. It was a grim, and often a hard world, this world of the high peaks. For long months the ice would bind the rocks in a grip of iron, the snows would block the passes, and about the soaring spires the winds would cry endlessly in the silence of the night. But it is a world I have grown to love, and I would like to tell you something about it.

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[1] Some Anthropologists put the date of man's first appearance on earth as 3 million years ago.

First, however, came man.

Just when, or where, he emerged we are not quite sure. The date is usually put at about one million years ago, and the place, in all probability, was somewhere in what today is called Central or Southern Africa. It is even possible to speculate that it might not have been far from the Drakensberg, but this remains pure speculation.

First came the man-apes, brutish creatures with low foreheads and prognathous jaws, but in the dim recesses of their minds was already hidden the promise of humanity. Like the great creatures of the slime, early man also fought and struggled and died, but unlike these creatures his destiny was not extinction but a long road ahead.

There came a time when his fingers closed on a gnarled stick, and he discovered a new dimension to his strength. He had used, for the first time, a tool, and from now on he was for ever separated from the beasts of the field. He had discovered the potential to change his world and become its master.

He started to change. He stood more erect. The long prognathous jaw began to recede, the flattened forehead grew and expanded and his intellect stirred. His hands became more flexible, especially his thumb, and he was able to devise new and better tools. At some time the lines of his face softened, the muscles of his jaw relaxed and became mobile, and he knew speech. He mastered the mysteries of fire, and modern man was born.

South Africa's past has been described as "the greatest silence in history". Even so, impressive finds of the early precursors of man have been made in Gauteng, the Free State, the Cape and Zimbabwe. In 1924 Professor Raymond Dart discovered the Taung skull in the north-western Cape, with a geological age of about a million years. This was the skull of a man-like ape, in contradistinction to the Java and Pekin finds, which were of ape-like men. Professor Dart christened it *Australopithecus africanus*, which means "Southern Ape of Africa". In 1936 Dr Robert Broom, a medical practitioner until the late J.H. Hofmeyr made it possible for him to devote his full time to palaeontology, investigated the Sterkfontein finds of man-apes, and Makapansgat was the scene of yet another discovery investigated by Professor Phillip V. Tobias. Swartkrans and Kromdraai added their names to the tally, while the whole of the Vaal River Basin proved an important area for the study of prehistoric man. Dr Broom, regarded in his time as the world's most distinguished comparative anatomist, believed that Africa was the cradle of the human race, and that it was probably in South Africa that man first emerged.

No skeletal remains of man earlier than the Late Stone Age have been found in Natal, but he certainly lived here, as Middle and Early Stone Age tools have been found in great abundance all the way from the mountains to the sea. His skeletal remains were no doubt swept away by the heavy erosion of the Late Pleistocene period.

But as far as the Drakensberg itself is concerned, nothing has been found here dating back to a period earlier than a few centuries ago. A careful plotting of Middle Stone Age sites in Natal indicates clearly that they ended about the 1 220 m contour level. It might be thought that the heavy erosion to be expected in this mountain region had obliterated all signs of early man in the Drakensberg, and that he might have lived here in spite of the lack of evidence, but even in sheltered caves protected from erosion not a single sign of early man has ever been found. The late Professor O. Davies was of the opinion that "the rarity of older remains in the Drakensberg foothills suggests that man moved into them recently". He gives no reason for this late arrival, but A.R. Willcox believes that early man did not inhabit the Drakensberg because it was so heavily forested in those days.

But no one really knows.

Before we move on to the first recorded inhabitants of the Drakensberg, let us try and get all that we have said in this chapter into perspective, and summarise our figures. According to the latest computation, when man first appeared on the scene, roughly a million years ago, the oceans had already swarmed with living creatures for more than 500 million years, although the first signs of life had appeared immeasurably earlier than this. The subsequent figures are approximately as follows:

- Green plants appeared 490 million years ago.
- The first vertebrates (fish) appeared about 410 million years ago.
- Amphibians appeared 300 million years ago.
- Reptiles appeared 270 million years ago.
- The Molteno Formation was laid down 210 to 220 million years ago.
- The Elliot Formation (Red Beds) was laid down 210 million years ago.
- The Clarens Sandstone Formation was laid down 200 million years ago.

- The great lava flows occurred 120 to 180 million years ago.
- Early mammals appeared 60 million years ago.
- The Drakensberg possibly became recognisable as a mountain chain 1,5 million years ago (very approximate)[1].
- Man appeared one million years ago.

Unfortunately the human mind is unable to grasp the significance of figures as huge as these. Let us reduce them proportionately to more manageable form, and imagine that green plants appeared 68 days ago, just over two months back. Then the other figures would be as follows:

- The first vertebrates would have appeared 57 days ago.
- Amphibians would have appeared 42 days ago.
- Reptiles would have appeared 37 days ago.
- The Molteno Formation would have been laid down 29 to 30 days ago.
- The Elliot Formation (Red Beds) would have been laid down 29 days ago.
- The Clarens Sandstone Formation would have been laid down 28 days ago.
- The volcanic lavas would have poured out 17 to 25 days ago.
- Early mammals would have appeared 8 days ago.
- The Drakensberg would have appeared as a recognisable mountain chain about five hours ago.
- Man would have appeared on the scene only a little over three hours ago.
- His whole recorded history would have started only one minute ago!

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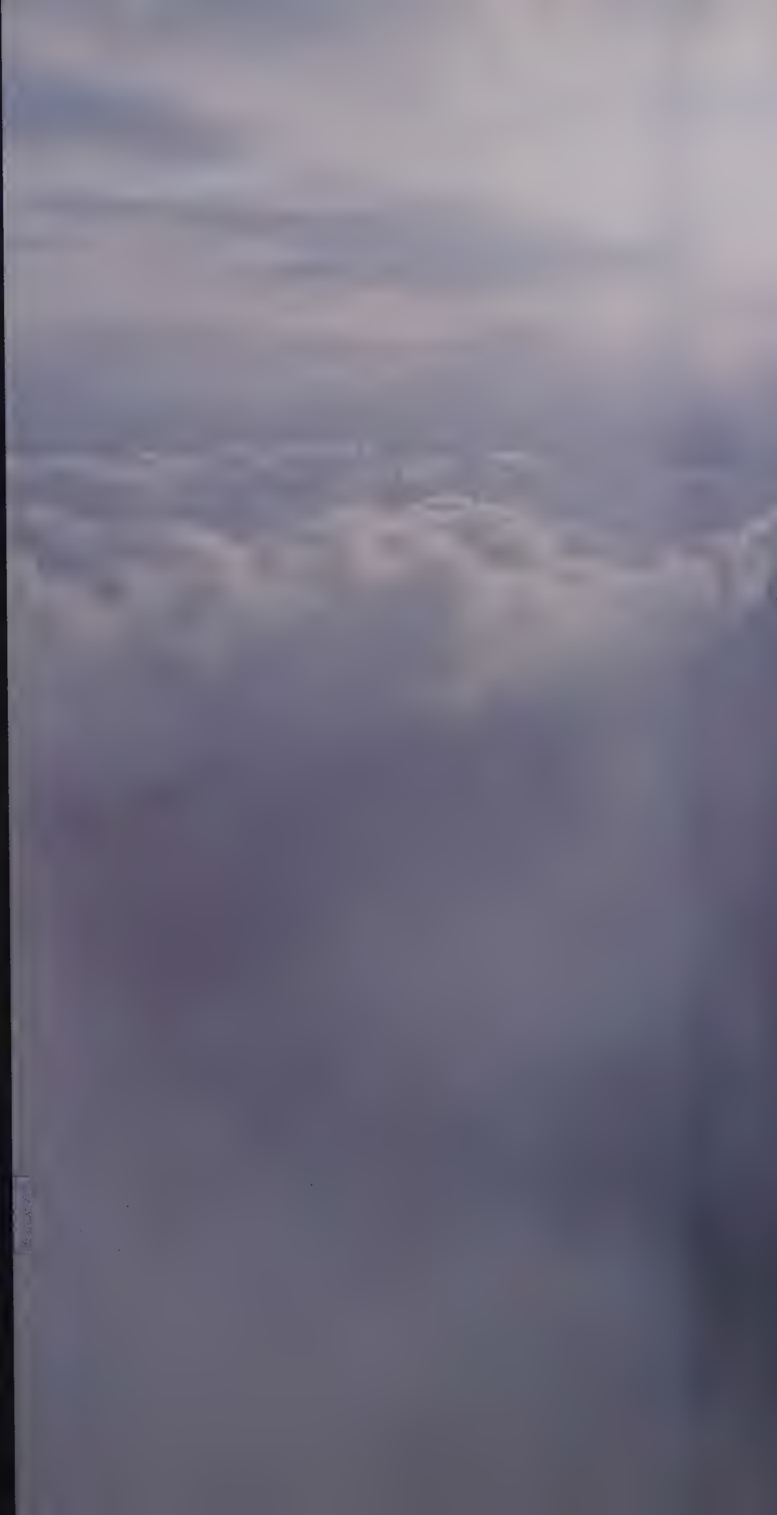
[1] This is, however, debatable. L.C. King suggests the development of a proto-Drakensberg escarpment approximately 500 m high soon after the fragmentation of Gondwanaland (142-133 million years ago). The escarpment has since retreated to its present position.

PART ONE

In which the reader, having watched the setting of the stage, meets some of the actors

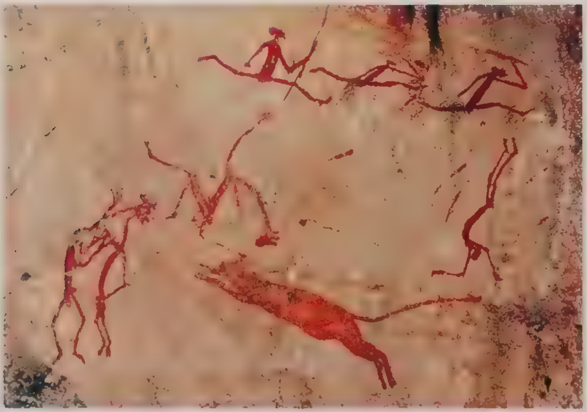


CHAPTER I

CHILDREN OF THE MIST

I am as old as my disappointments in life,
and as young as my naughtiest thought.
Xameb the Bushman to Professor P.J. Schoeman,
Hunters of the Desert Land.

Xan-xeib the Bushman sat at the entrance of his sandstone cave, shaping the rounded stone which he was making for his *qibi*, the digging stick. Tomorrow Xos, his wife, would use it to dig up the ants' nest they had found down in the valley. Behind them the mountains were a bright splendour of shimmering blue, topped with the massive face of Ngonomateng, or Mdedelelo, as the amaZizi down in the plains called it, and which in time to come the white man would call Cathkin Peak. Below him the sunlight slept in the green valley, and in the sky above the great cloud caravans moved silently across an azure plain. Behind him Xos was preparing the bulbs and roots they had gathered that morning, while in the far corner Son-eib, the old shaman of the tribe, was painting an oribi on the wall of the cave.

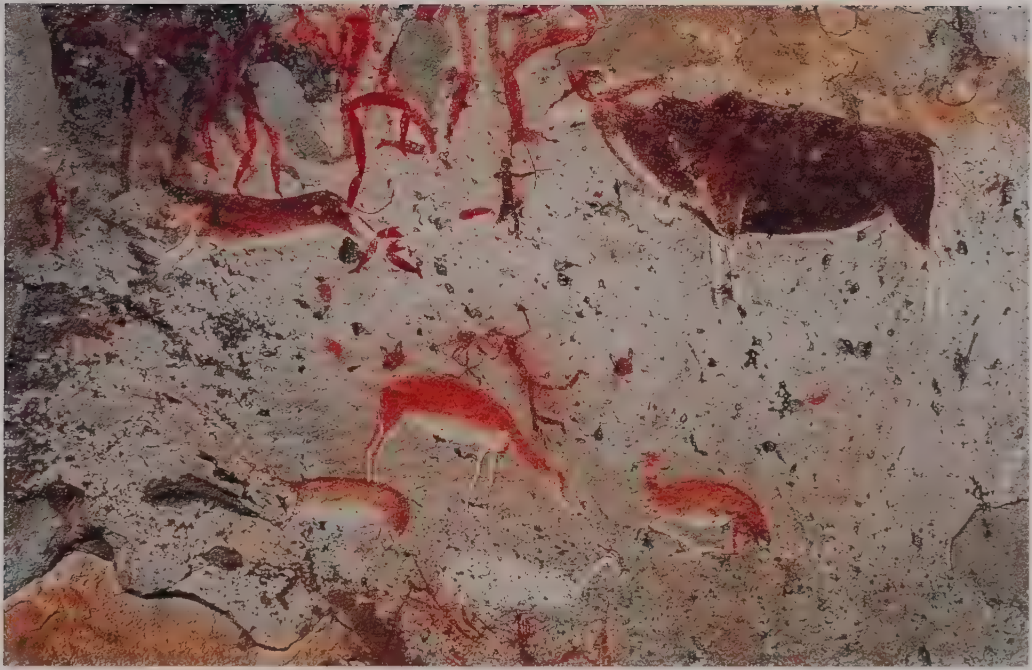

Bushmen and leopard Malcolm Pearse

Below, in the valley, he could see his two sons, Kaang and Kibike, stalking an eland, while away off, down in the plains, he could see the beehive huts of the amaZizi, and the smoke from their fires curling drowsily in the pale sunlight. Many, many moons had the amaZizi dwelt there, how long he could not remember. Son-eib, the old man of the cave, who was so old that the wrinkled skin of his stomach hung down in massive folds almost to his thighs, claimed to remember when they had first arrived with their chief Langa, from where the sun rose in the east. But the land was big, there was plenty for all. The amaZizi lived apart with their flocks and their herds, and had no liking for the mountains, preferring the long, rolling plains, while Xan-xeib and his people loved to roam the warm, sun-filled valleys of the Little Berg, and climb the rock-girt peaks. They lived by hunting, and knew little of domestic animals, let alone vast herds of cattle. There was no clashing of interests, and there was peace between the people of Xan-xeib and the amaZizi.

How long he and his people had lived in this pleasant land, was lost in the mists of time. Xan-xeib, neither knew nor cared, for the game was fat, life was good, and below the whole valley slept in the soft afternoon sunlight.

From where had he come, and why was he dwelling here in the high Drakensberg? In his *Native Races of South Africa*, first published in 1905, Stow expressed the view that the Bushmen were the earliest inhabitants of South Africa, and today many anthropologists still hold this to be true.

The remains of Stone Age man in South Africa have been



Malcolm Pearse

Bushman Art

A magnificent frieze showing a leopard, large eland, bushmen and rhebok differentiated by archaeologists into three periods: Early Stone Age, prior to about 50 000 years ago; Middle Stone Age, lasting from about 50 000 years to about 16 000 years ago; and Later Stone Age, from about 16 000 years ago right down – in the Natal Drakensberg – to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Bushmen belong to the Later Stone Age and no skeletal remains of Bushmen from the first two cultures have been found.

Archaeological evidence and cave paintings similar to the ones so richly displayed in the Drakensberg suggest that the Bushmen were formerly widespread in East and Central Africa, and perhaps even further north, although there is no convincing archaeological evidence to suggest that they originated anywhere other than Africa. According to Professor P.V. Tobias[1], it is likely that the Khoisans (Bushmen and Hottentots) and blacks share a common ancestor, the Negriforms. Their evolutionary separation probably began sometime around the onset of the Later Stone Age, between 15 000 and 25 000 years ago. The subsequent micro-evolution of the two groups led to considerable differences, but not so as to obliterate their basically similar genetic make-up.

Simulation of an occupied Bushmen shelter. Main Caves, Giants Castle John Hone

Main Cave, Giant's Castle John Hone

The Bushmen are now generally believed to be the aboriginal inhabitants of Southern Africa, predating even the Hottentots or Khoikhoi, who only a few thousand years ago adopted a pastoral way of life and moved south with it.

When the first white settlers arrived in Table Bay in 1652, the San or Bushmen must have inhabited the entire Southern African region. In 1655 the first recorded contact took place between the Bushmen and a party of Burghers under a Dutch official, Wintervogel, on the banks of the Berg River. Certainly at the turn of the nineteenth century, and for many years prior to that, the only inhabitants of the Drakensberg were Bushmen.

The southern Bushmen, like the Kalahari Bushmen of today, were small in stature, the average height about 1,22 m to 1,37 m. Their general build was slim and lean, and even young Bushmen showed little of the rounded outlines of youth. The amount of fat under the skin was remarkably small. The back was generally hollowed, and the stomach often protruding. Their skin was lightly pigmented, the lips moderately thick, but sometimes thin and inverted, and the nose small, depressed and flat. The chin was generally receding, as was the forehead. They had relatively little facial and body hair. The eyes were generally fairly widely spaced apart, with a characteristic small fold of skin over the inner corners of the upper eyelids.

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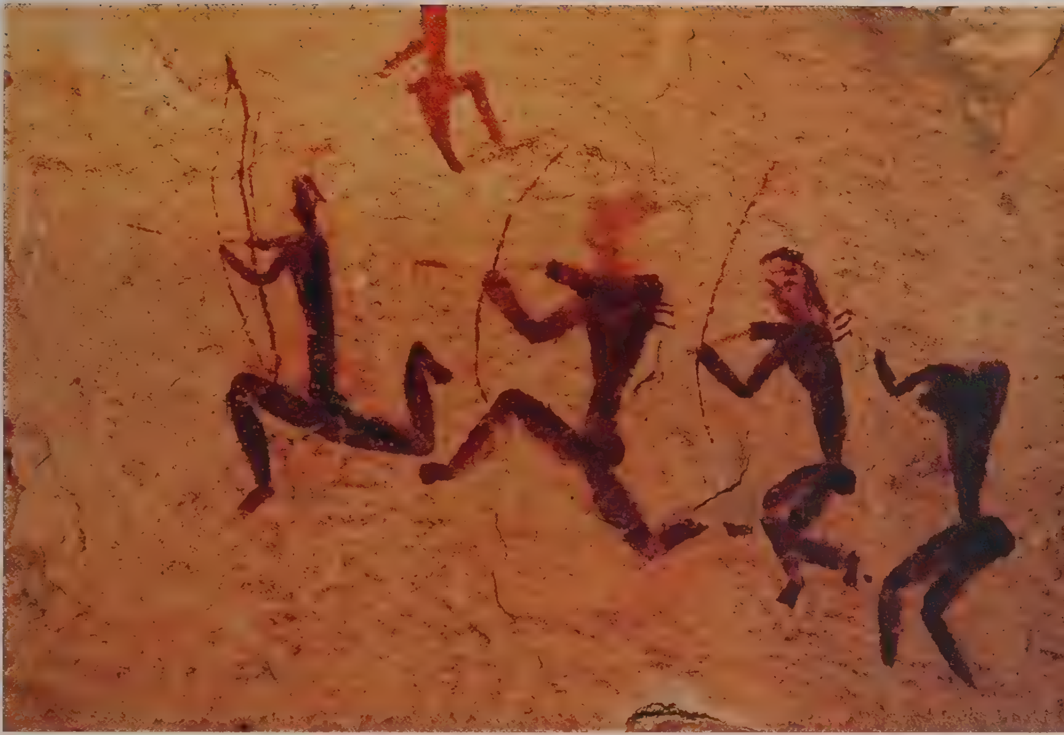
[1] Tobias, P.V. *The Bushmen*, Human and Rousseau, 1978.

Dancing, acting, dressing up and story-telling were an integral part of traditional Bushman culture, and their folklore and mythology are equalled only by the scope and extent of their famous rock paintings. Some idea of the astonishing wealth of this folklore may be formed when we realise that the material collected and transcribed by Dr Wilhelm Bleek and housed today in the Jagger Library at the University of Cape Town forms 84 volumes of 11 500 pages. Bleek was far-sighted enough to realise towards the end of the 19th century that the Bushman way of life and language were fast disappearing. He persuaded the Governor of the Cape at the time to allow some Bushmen who had been brought to the Cape as convicts to come and live with him. The thousands of pages that Bleek subsequently transcribed are a vivid and fascinating testimony to the life, myths and beliefs of these Stone Age people. Without Bleek's records, our knowledge of the southern San and their now extinct way of life would be severely and sadly lacking.

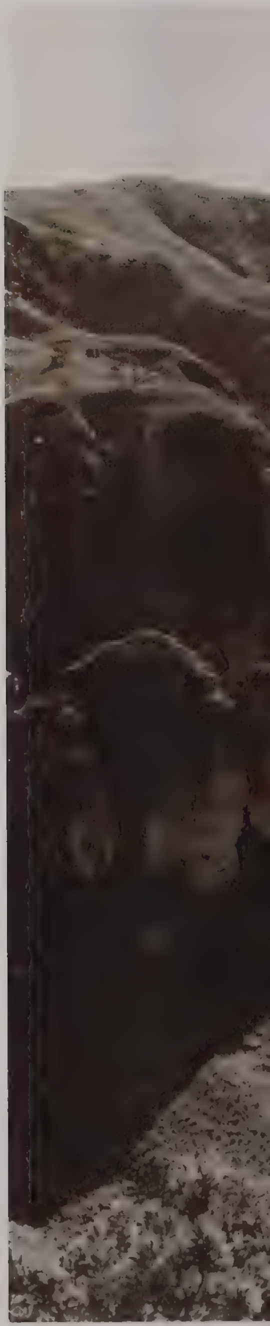


Three Bushmen with bows and arrows together with a woman. This most likely depicts a trance dance scene Malcolm Pearse

In earlier settler days the Bushmen were much maligned for being dirty, cruel, vindictive and degenerate, and were regarded as little better than animals and barbarians, untaught and unteachable. A French missionary once said that they clucked like turkeys, while Livingstone remarked that they were as baboon-like as baboons were Bushman-like! But the cruelties attributed to them were the result of equal barbarities practised on them by early settler and black alike. In 1846 John Shepstone, brother of the famous Sir Theophilus Shepstone, reported that the Bushmen had been much maligned and described them as intelligent, kindly, hospitable, generous, and certainly not vicious or depraved, as they so often had been represented. He went on to say, however, that the Bushman was a born thief!

As well as being accomplished painters, the Bushmen were often poetic in speech. "A woman's heart," said Xameb the Bushman to Professor Schoeman, "is like the flush of dawn. It conquers every dark night. Give her rest, and the marrow of every buck you shoot, and her heart soars above all the dusty trails of everyday life." And on another occasion: "The paths on which the youthful heart seeks fulfilment of its dreams are long paths, but they are very beautiful. Along those paths you walk with eyes raised to the far-away mountains. You will not trip over any stone, nor will you tread on any thorns. There, no snake lurks in the grass; there, no tired voice of a mother calls you to soothe the crying baby, or wash a pot. Beautiful paths, these, on which a young heart lingers with its dreams." Equally beautiful is the description of dawn as the time "when the white bull tears the black blanket of the night with his red horns." This is poetry of a high order.

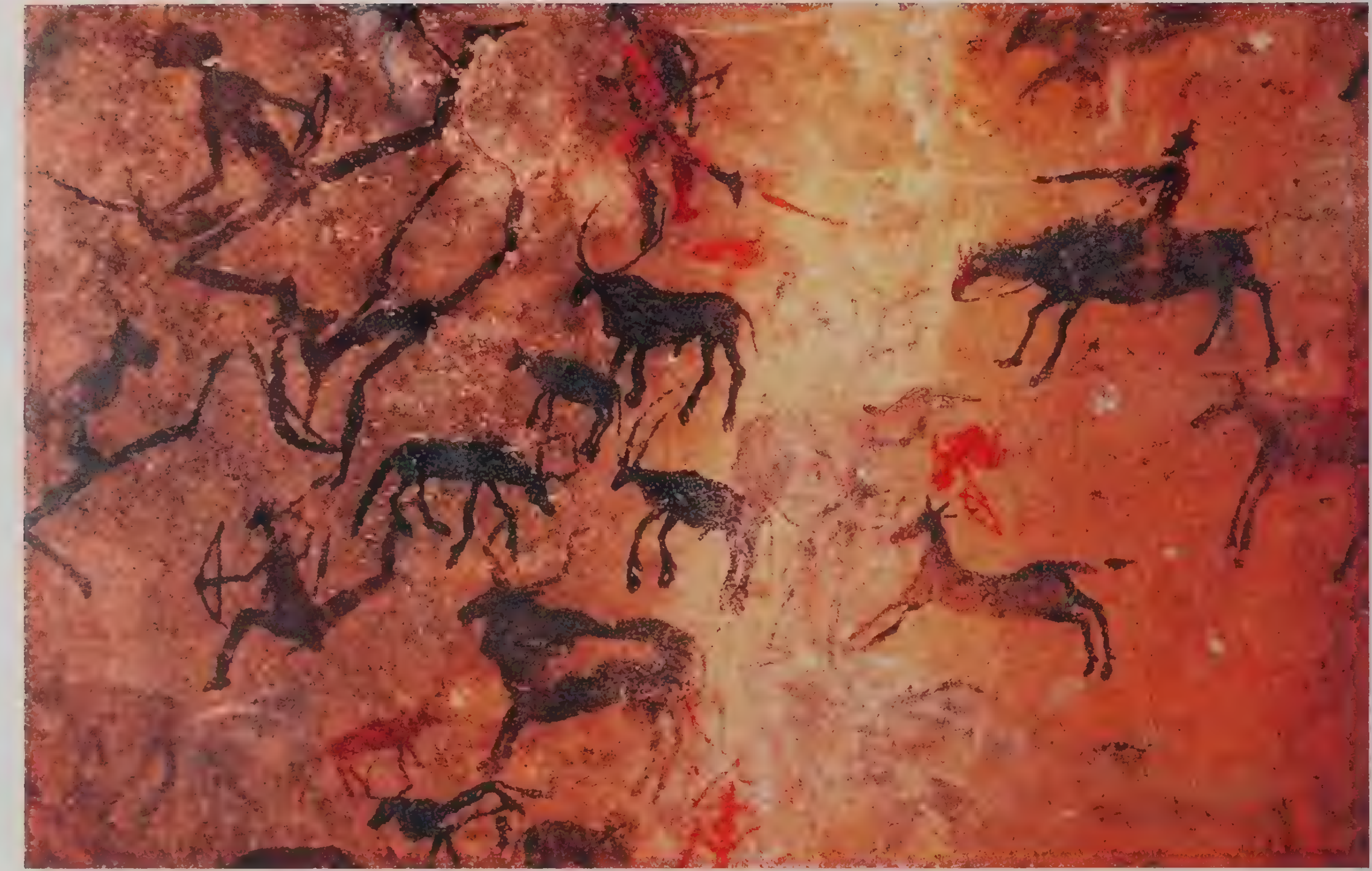
Malcolm Pearse



Home to the Bushmen

Over countless centuries erosion in the valleys and foothills of the Drakensberg carved numerous sandstone caves, many of which became home to the Bushmen families. Eland Cave in the central Drakensberg (above) is a particularly large example. Right: The Injisuthi Valley, not far from Battle Cave, with its magnificent rock paintings

Malcolm Pearse



In latter years the Bushmen became the hunted! A scene from the southern Drakensberg showing a skirmish between Bushmen and men on horseback Malcolm Pearse

The southern Bushmen lived in small groups consisting of a few extended families. In the Drakensberg these "bands" or "camps" lived a roving, nomadic life, moving when their food or water supply demanded it. During summer they probably moved to the higher areas, where the rains had caused new, sweet grass to grow, thus attracting herds of antelope. Many of the caves in these areas are rich in rock art. During the winter the group would descend to the more temperate, lower regions, where there are fewer paintings.

Bushman society was essentially egalitarian, with every member of the group enjoying equal status. There were apparently no chiefs among the southern Bushmen until fairly late in history when encroaching settlers began to pose a threat to their survival. The life of the band was relatively simple, revolving around the continual search for food.

Down in the river valleys and the approaches to the Berg lived the amaZizi, a tribe of the Embo Nguni group, and between the two peoples there was peace. The amaZizi were pastoralists and agriculturists; the Bushmen were hunters and gatherers, and never tilled the ground or kept cattle, so there was initially never any cause for friction. It must have been an idyllic era – the Bushmen at peace with one another and with their abaNtu-speaking neighbours, their only enemies the beasts of prey. It is only in their later paintings that scenes of battle and of war occur.

And they must have seen the Drakensberg at its best, in all its early glory, before the white man came with his hunting rifles, his ploughshares, his tree-felling and his soil erosion. Here the grass grew rich and green, the forests filled the deep river valleys, the only sound was the splash of water, and the well-fed buck drank deep from the coldest and clearest of mountain pools.

And here he dreamed, while the ages came and went. Here he spun his timeless stories of */Kaggen* the mantis, of *Quap*, the elephant, of *Kauru*, the dassie, and *!xo*, the porcupine. The mantis was the favourite hero of Bushman folklore. But there seems to be some doubt as to whether the Bushmen actually worshipped the mantis. They certainly seem to have worshipped a Supreme Being, whose aid they invoked in times of drought and distress. They also believed in a lesser god, who was treacherous, vengeful and destructive. They buried their dead with an implicit faith in a return to life. To the Bushman the stars were the campfires of the departed. Myths, fables, legends, poetry, tales about the sun and the moon, histories, tribal customs, traditions, all came tumbling out of the fertile minds and the teeming imaginations of the Bushmen.

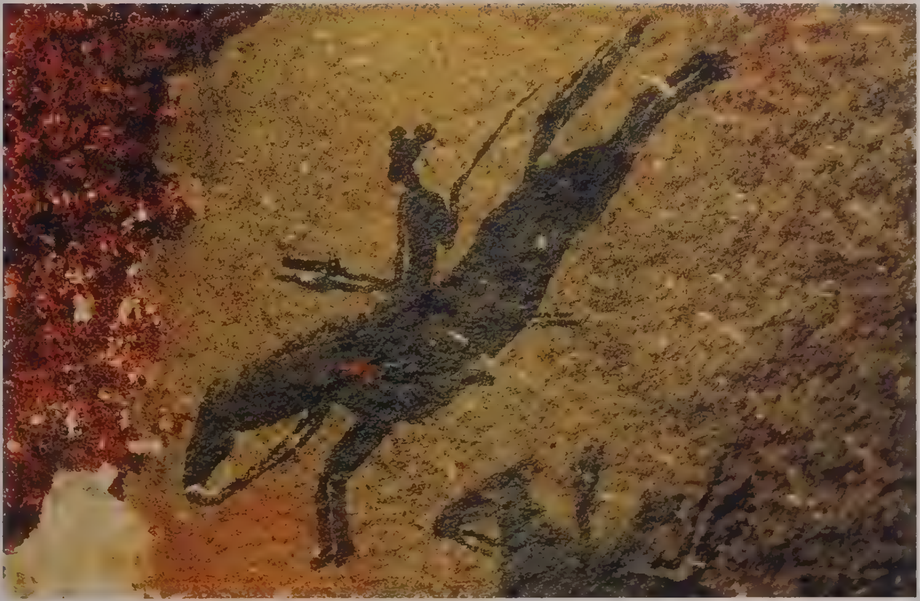
Occasionally, in all the mass of Bushman myth and fable, is something that startles one with its ancient wisdom, the wisdom of forgotten ages. "When the world was still in twilight," begins one of their stories, "When the world was still in twilight, and full of marshes..." How did the Bushman know that?

How did he know a great many things, known only to few even today? How did he find his way from point to point? Early investigators have told of the amazing ability to make his way, in a straight line, for hundreds of kilometres, to any place he had been to before – and he could never explain how he did it. Even children of nine or ten years of age could do this after a lapse of many months.

William Bazley, the Byrne immigrant and founder of the town of Port Shepstone, discovered last century that the Bushmen had found a method of inoculating themselves against snake bite, a secret which modern man discovered only much later. A snake would be held by the head so as to pull back the upper lip. The exposed fangs were then drawn across the upper arm, making two fine scratches, into which a drop of venom would be rubbed. Another discovery, made by Dr Wilhelm Bleek last century, was that the Bushmen had been observing four of the moons of Jupiter long before astronomers had discovered them with the aid of telescopes.

The Bushman had an intimate knowledge of wild animals and their ways, and this knowledge extended to other fields as well. He never cultivated a single plant, but he had an intimate knowledge of their properties, edible, medicinal and poisonous. He had an equally intimate knowledge of the heavens. He was able to differentiate all the major stars, and understood the movements of the planets in their courses.

He had amazing speed and stamina, and as a hunter the Bushman was superb. Captain A.W. Drayson, who hunted in the area between Pietermaritzburg and the Bushman's River in 1850, said that a Bushman



A creature from the spirit world on horseback. Note the rider's animal features and the spears Malcolm Pearse could hit a running buck at a distance of 75 m and could deliver 10 arrows in twice as many seconds.

He certainly lived on the fat of the land, venison, of course, was always available in quantity in the Drakensberg, and was supplemented by a variety of other sources. "Bushman rice" was a favourite item. This consisted of termites' eggs, fried in a pot made of baked earth. Locusts were considered a great delicacy, and lizards, frogs, worms and caterpillars all added variety, while bulbs, roots and berries were a welcome addition to their diet. Sometimes they would take part of an eland's hide, and throw it on the fire. When it was burnt quite crisp, it would be taken off and left to cool. It was then pounded with a stone into powder, thrown into a pot with water, and boiled. It soon became a thick jelly, and this was used for food when game was scarce. They ate voraciously when meat was available, and yet could also go for relatively long periods without food.

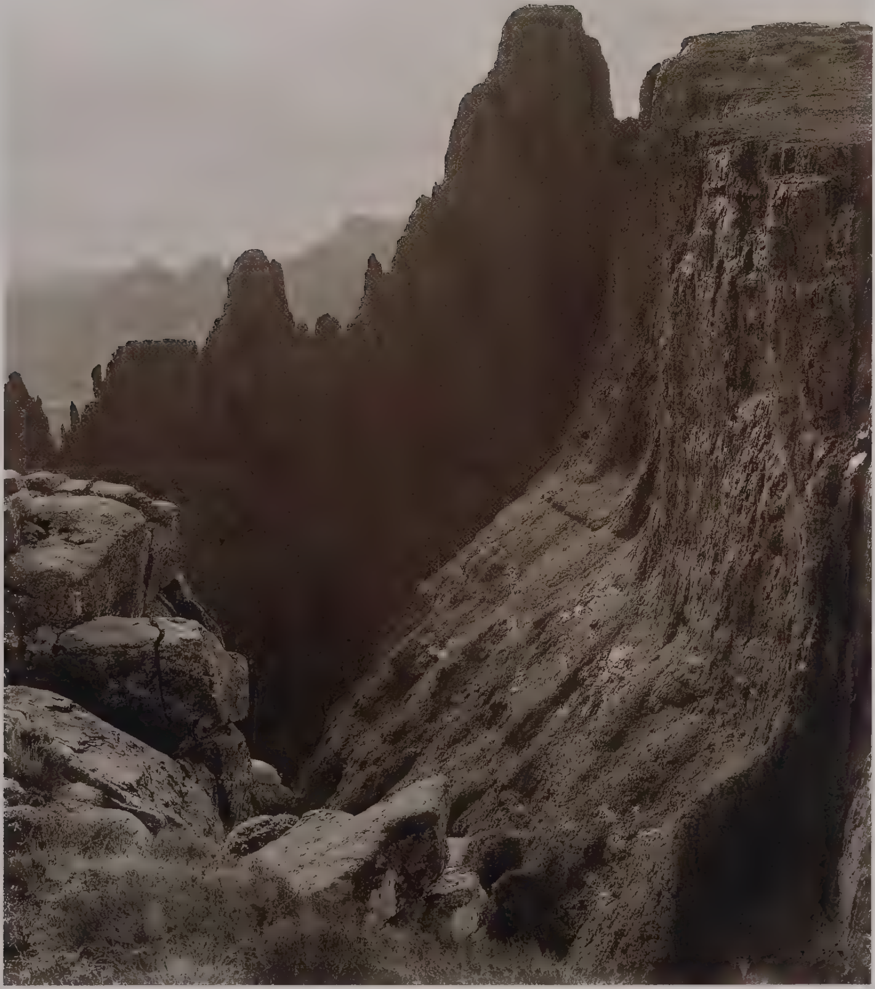
Honey was greatly esteemed. To reach the bees' nest, they often used leather thongs as ropes, and sometimes wooden pegs as pitons. Within a couple of kilometres of my home, in the valley of the Makuruman, I discovered, deep in the forest, the remains of a very old wooden ladder tied together with riempies, almost rotted away, leaning against a huge yellowwood tree. It might, of course, have been of abaNtu origin, but from their paintings the Bushmen are known to have constructed ladders of this type, and it certainly was very old. In 1930 Professor Sweeney and his wife, crossing over the Ntonjelana valley to the uMhlwazini, made a similar discovery in the Oqalweni forest – an old, almost rotten ladder leaning against a rock wall, with an obvious beehive in a high crack in the rock above it. Again, it may not have been of Bushman origin, but, like the one I found, it had been made without nails.

The Bushmen were essentially Stone Age people. They were expert stone-workers, and their implements included digging sticks (the *qibi*, a long stick passed through a stone with a hole in it, used for digging, breaking ants' nests, etc.), pipe-bowls (they were avid smokers), stone knives and arrow heads. During the last century a wealth of stone implements were found in the caves of the Drakensberg, which were at first not understood. In 1855 Colonel T.H. Bowker had recognised them for what they were, and made a collection of similar implements from the caves in the Cape. Boucher de Perthes, a French archaeologist, interpreted them correctly, and Sir Langham Dale, Superintendent General of Education for the Cape, also became interested, and was among the first to link these stone implements with the Bushmen.

Their arrows were especially interesting. They consisted of a point fixed to a short reed collar, which, in turn, was connected to a main shaft by a link. When the arrow struck home, the main shaft would fall away and the point would be left embedded in the animal. The arrow heads were made of ivory, bone or quartzite (flint is not found in South Africa) and sometimes of indurated shale and quartzite. These were kept carefully in a quiver made of buckskin. The heads were tipped with a virulent poison, of which there were a variety, including snake venom and euphorbia sap. Scorpion venom and the poison of a black spider of the genus *Mygale* may also have been used. Some bulbs found in the Drakensberg are known to be poisonous, and may have been used. The bulb of *Boophane disticha* contains a virulent poison, the nature of which has not yet been identified. *Moraea alticola*, the yellow iris, which is common on the summit of the Drakensberg, is also known to be poisonous. The juice of *Acokanthera oppositifolia* (common name Bushman's Gif) has been suggested, although this does not grow in the Drakensberg itself but close by in the Midlands of Natal. Xameb the Bushman told Professor Schoeman that the venom of snakes was used, but admitted that there was another ingredient, the details of which he refused to divulge. Today the Kalahari Bushmen make their poison from the larvae of a small beetle.

But it is by their rock paintings that the Bushmen will chiefly be remembered. These are far more extensive than is generally realised, and the rock paintings of Southern Africa probably exceed in number those in all other parts of the world combined. In all South Africa, no area is richer in rock art than the Natal Drakensberg. The paintings range from monochromes to shaded polychromes, where carefully graduated washes have been used to achieve the desired result. Human figures and antelope even display foreshortening and perspective. The renowned South African artist Walter Battiss remarked on the Bushman's excellent portrayal of the human figure, which is usually depicted in animated action. There is a keen perception of line and form and graceful curve, even in the drawing of sinews and muscles, and a concentration on the most important features, with all else being left out. Unlike Western art with its often complicated backgrounds and foregrounds, Bushman art concentrates starkly on one single theme, animated action, or calm repose. "No artist," said Battiss, "has said more, saying less."

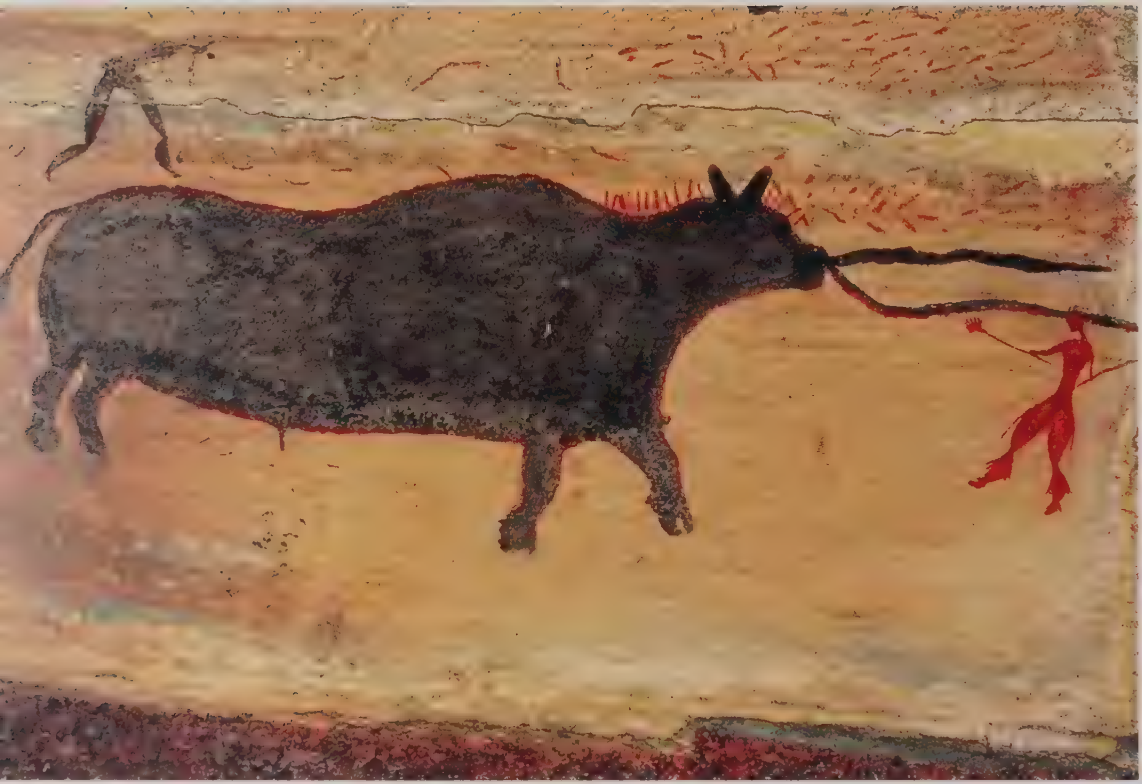
A great deal has been discovered about the materials used in Bushman



Malcolm Pearse

uMponjwana (3 117 m)

uMponjwana, once known as Rockeries Tower, is a prominent feature from the Mnweni valley



An ox 'rain animal'. The red hatches on the animal's back probably indicate that it is in the process of dying. Rain falls from above. The 'line' to its face links the animal to another related element in the scene further to the right Malcolm Pearse

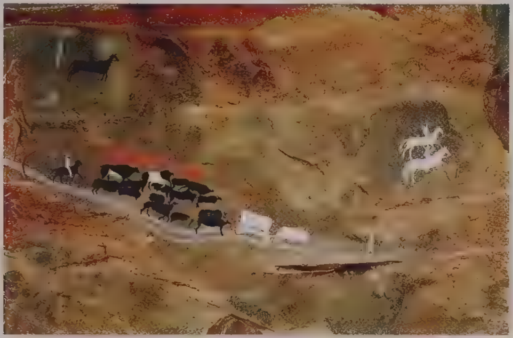
paintings. It is fairly certain that most of their colours were of natural rock-mineral origin. Since the days of Pompeii it has been known that ochre (iron oxide) will change colour if heated. A range of bright colours results – from yellow to claret, dark red, deep purple, browns and chocolates. A small quantity of this reddish-brown paint was analysed some years ago by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and found to consist of haematite and mixed hydrated iron oxides. Similarly, manganese ores were used for purple and purplish-black, while kaolin clay, bird droppings and lime deposits supplied the white pigment. There appeared to be three different kinds of white. When wet, one remains the same, one tends to go black, and the other disappears almost completely until it dries again. The colours most commonly used appear to be browns and reds, whites and blacks, while pure yellow, green, blue and purple are practically never used.

What still gives rise to much speculation is exactly what media they used to mix their paints with. The durability of Bushman paintings is quite phenomenal considering the environment to which they are often exposed. These primitive painters solved successfully the problems of counteracting the eroding action of sun and wind and the cold of snow and frost. Water, however, destroys the paintings completely, and for this reason one should *never* spray paintings with water to bring out the colours.

What, then, did they use? Tree gums, melted fat, beeswax, gall and honey are all possibilities. Blood may have been used especially for the red colours, as well as hyracium (rock-rabbit urine) and egg-white, as tests have revealed the presence of amino acids. Many shelters with paintings have been found to contain a wealth of ostrich-egg shells. The thick white juice of plants such as *Asclepias gibba* and *Cotyledon orbiculata* is also known to have been used, and also the juice of *Eulophia clavicornis* var. *clavicornis*, *Parapodium castatum* and *Euryops multifidus*.

In the Drakensberg, human beings are the most common subjects portrayed, and antelope, particularly eland, are also extremely common. Snakes and frogs are fairly rare, although the Main Caves at Giant's Castle contain some fine paintings of snakes. No prehistoric or extinct animals are shown, except the quagga. Sheep, oxen and horses appear in the later paintings. Many paintings depict hunters with their bows and arrows, usually portrayed very vividly in animated action. Animals are usually portrayed in repose, and sometimes trotting.

These paintings are of absorbing interest, for they provide a fascinating glimpse into the life and customs of Later Stone Age man. The interpretation of many of them is extremely difficult, and puzzles abound. Near Bethlehem, in the Free State, is an interesting picture of a red and yellow painted disc with a long tail streaking behind it. Bees and beehives have been identified in many Bushman paintings, one of which is in a cave in the Didima valley, near Cathedral Peak.



Either Captain Allen Gardiner's trek into the Drakensberg foothills, 1835, or Petrus Uys's Kommissie Trek of 1834 through the Underberg area *The original rock art of the above depiction has almost completely faded away. An artist has accurately reconstructed the scene from archived reference material*

Can we say with any certainty how old these paintings are? Unfortunately not. Some are accepted as fairly recent (that is, after 1652), since they portray the white man's sheep and cattle, his horses, and even redcoats with guns, while a painting in the western Cape depicts a sailing ship. But how far they go back we do not know. An interesting clue has been provided by the Bushman practice of superimposing one picture on another. Investigations have shown that the lower layers never depict abaNtu figures, which would suggest that the earliest pictures were executed before the abaNtu appeared on the scene.

What about carbon dating? Unfortunately there is insufficient carbon in the paintings to make this an easy matter. A few attempts have been made, giving tentative results of about 2 000 years. A little easier is the carbon dating of cave occupation. Two archaeological digs have given a date of about 3 000 BC. Whether we can conclude from this that any of the paintings visible today could have been executed as far back as this is doubtful. Paintings on cave walls would have deteriorated and disappeared by now with the passage of time.

A final question one might ask is why the Bushmen painted these magnificent paintings. Fortunately the extensive ethnography compiled by Dr Wilhelm Bleek in the 1870s provides us with a record of the myths, beliefs and life-style of this now extinct people, without which their art could not be interpreted. According to Professor J.D. Lewis-Williams, a well-known expert on the rock art of Southern Africa, it would be wrong to assume that Bushman art was “no more than a remarkable exercise in aesthetics”[1], and much of the art was intimately connected with Bushman beliefs and metaphors.

Today thousands of rock paintings are to be found in the Drakensberg. Perhaps many others await discovery. They form an incalculable art treasure, for this and future generations. Unfortunately vandals have already defaced many of these irreplaceable records, to the extent that today serious workers in the field are not announcing their discoveries to the general public and the authorities have fenced in the better-known caves. What an indictment this is of modern civilisation! We do not deserve to have such priceless works of art entrusted to our safe-keeping. It is a responsibility that was keenly recognised by Lawrence Green, who described these caves and their exquisite paintings as “a staging post in man's long journey from the vast blackness of the silent past into the light of recorded history”.

* * *

There came a day when Xan-xeib the Bushman, sitting at the entrance of his cave, heard from afar a strange sound, a vague and menacing clamour as of men in turmoil, and looking up, he saw, away in the distance, a yet stranger sight – the beehive huts of the amaZizi going up in flame and smoke.

The red fires of invasion had come to his happy hunting grounds, and his days were numbered.

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[1] Lewis-Williams, J.D. *Rock Art of Southern Africa*, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

The uMhlwazini River Valley

Before heading east to meet up with the uThukela, the uMhlwazini winds its way between the folds of the hills in a northerly direction all the way from the central 'berg into the Cathedral Peak region. This was once home to the Bushmen and many rock art sites exist in the area

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 2

THE BLACK MAN

I am black, but comely, O ye
daughters of Jerusalem
Song of Solomon

Just when the amaZizi settled in the foothills of the Drakensberg we are not quite sure. They were a tribe of the Embo Nguni group, which arrived in Southern Africa round about AD 300. Of the origin of the abaNtu, as in the case of the Bushmen, we are also not sure. It is conjectured that something like 2 000 years ago African negroes fused with a Hamitic or Semitic stock from Asia, and that from this fusion came the abaNtu, their homeland being the region of southern Sudan. They had learned the art of iron smelting.

Round about the time of Christ they started drifting southwards, a strange, unaccountable mystical urge that again and again, down the ages, has seized on a particular people for reasons we do not know. As they travelled southwards, they became intermingled with other people, some of whom they absorbed. When they reached the neighbourhood of the East Coast they mixed their blood with Arab and Asiatic traders.

Radio-carbon dating shows that they reached the Zambezi about AD 100. By AD 300 they had settled in Zimbabwe, by AD 500 in northern Gauteng and by AD 700 they were in northern Zululand. From there they spread westwards and southwards, and by the thirteenth century were settled permanently throughout Natal.

Their own tradition tells us that the amaZizi arrived in the foothills of the Drakensberg about AD 1700, under the Chief Langa, but as we have seen, the advance guard of the Embo Nguni invasion reached the foothills of the Drakensberg much earlier, in about AD 1200. It is possible that they were not the first to arrive, but that other related tribes preceded them, and then passed on southwards into Pondoland. Whatever the exact date may be, we do at least know that prior to the white man's arrival the amaZizi had inhabited the foothills of the Drakensberg in peace and contentment for many, many years. Pushing up the river valleys which cut westwards into these mountain solitudes, they had come with their families, their herds and their cattle, and soon the broad valley of the Bushman's, the heavily forested valleys of the Injisuthi, the smiling valley of the Sterkspruit, the uMhlwazini and the uMlambonje, the Mnweni and the ubuSingatha, were dotted with their beehive huts and grazing cattle.

Near them, higher up in the mountains, dwelt the Bushmen, but there was peace between them. The amaZizi were pastoralists and herdsmen: the Bushmen were hunters. There was no clash of interests. In fact, the evidence suggests that there was a good deal of intermingling and intermarriage. Among the amaZizi who remain today in the Drakensberg clear Bushman characteristics can often be seen. Burial sites of the amaZizi have been discovered and excavated in rock shelters near the present Cathkin Park Hotel and on the farm Brotherton in the Cathedral area, and the skeletons show Bushman characteristics. A.T. Bryant, in an unpublished manuscript in the Killie Campbell Library, refers to the "remarkable, intimate relationship" that existed for a time between the Nguni and the Bushmen. Unlike the other abaNtu tribes the amaZizi used bows and arrows, a practice they may well have learnt from their Bushmen neighbours.

The years drifted by, and nothing occurred to disturb the tranquillity of their idyllic existence. Round about 1700 the amaTheza, a small clan of the amaZizi living in the valley of the Upper Bushman's, beneath the hill iSandlulube, hived off and trekked north. They travelled through the foothills of the Mnweni into the Mont-aux-Sources area, and from there crossed over the Drakensberg by the pass known today as Basuto Gate (previously known as Gordon's Pass) and so into the Witsieshoek area. After a brief stay there, they passed on into the valley of the Caledon, and so into Lesotho. This small clan came to be known as the amaPhetla, or Pioneers, for these were the first blacks (or abaNtu) to settle in Lesotho, hitherto the undisputed domain of the Bushmen. They had opened up a road into a new country. With later accretions, they formed the nucleus of the Sotho nation, the Basotho of today.

But the bulk of the tribe stayed on in the beautiful valleys of the Little Berg, for here life was good, the grass was green, and many streams flowed down from the mountains and watered this pleasant land.

What could have been more idyllic a setting for their beehive huts than nestling under the blue peaks of the Drakensberg? Together with their cousins in the other Embo Nguni tribes, the amaZizi had evolved a simple dwelling, only a rough binding together of saplings and grass, and yet architecturally and aesthetically, it was highly successful: strong, cosy, beautifully proportioned and well ventilated. The thatch of both walls and roof kept an even temperature, warm in winter and cool in summer. There were no draughts: a perpetual stream of air circulated gently through the hut. The doorway was just the right height, big enough to admit light and small enough to keep out wind. By application of the "arch" principle, it was able to withstand the severest storms: the wind just glided over it.

As simple as their huts was the smooth tenor of their daily lives. The amaZizi, like most of the Nguni tribes, practised polygamy. Each wife had her own hut, where she lived with her children. These huts, together with others occupied by married children of the family head, would be grouped together in a simple kraal, all its occupants bound together by family ties. There were no villages, no roads, no rents to pay or to collect, no fences, and no private occupation of land. To the amaZizi, like all the Nguni tribes, the land and all its bounty belonged to all men.

Each kraal had a kraal head, whose authority was absolute and whose word was law. It was the kraal head who dispensed justice, a simple matter, for there was no written law and no lawlessness. There was a certain body of customary law (actually very little) and there was common sense. It was, no doubt, a benevolent despotism, but with the accent on benevolence. A number of kraals would be grouped together under a superior kraal head, the *umNumzane*. These, in turn, would be grouped together under an *iNduna*, and over all was the chief. It was as simple as that. The general code was simple: a respect for honour and decency. All had been trained to discipline and self-restraint.

Kingpin of the whole system was the *paterfamilias*, the head of the family. The one great law was complete and absolute submission to paternal authority. The head of the household demanded, and received, unquestioning and instant obedience, from wives, daughters, sons and even grown-up sons with families of their own.

The peaceful existence of the amaZizi was not to last, however. As Xan-xeib the Bushman had seen from his rock cave high in the mountains, the amaHhlubi one day swept down upon them from the north-east. It was 1818. Their tranquil life under the shadow of the Drakensberg was to end in fire and rapine. What had happened?

Although the events which triggered off the great invasions of the Drakensberg from 1818 to 1828 took place 260 km away, we must glance briefly at them if we are to understand what happened.

Away to the north-east, in far-off Zululand and on the plains of northern Natal, a number of other Nguni tribes had settled at about the same time that the amaZizi had reached the Drakensberg. Among them were the amaHlubi, under their chief Mtimkulu, one of the largest of the Nguni tribes; the amaNgwane under their chief Matiwane; the Mthethwa, under Dingiswayo; the Ndwandwe under Zwide; and the abakwaZulu ("The People of Heaven"), a rather small, insignificant tribe which had submitted to the authority of the Mthethwa. For something like 500 years these tribes had flourished and multiplied on the plains of one of the finest areas in all South Africa, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century there were clear signs of overpopulation.

Sir Theophilus Shepstone estimated their numbers at a million, and this figure was borne out by Major Charters, the commander of the military force sent to Port Natal in 1838, who estimated the number of people killed by uShaka at about the same figure. When Charles Barter visited the area around the uThukela in 1852 he remarked that the country bore clear signs of once having been very heavily populated. It was denuded of people, but ruins of old cattle kraals abounded. In 1802 a disastrous famine broke out, a clear indication that the land could not carry this vast and growing population. It only needed a spark to set the dry grass of the veld ablaze. That spark occurred in 1818, and it started a blaze which was to bring ruin and desolation to the tranquil land of the Drakensberg.

Immediate neighbours of the Mthethwa were the amaNgwane, living in the present Vryheid district, under a chief by the name of Matiwane. Matiwane was a savage and merciless despot. He was fierce and proud, with a short, broad build and a pronounced stoop. He was a man of

Malcolm Pearse

Cloud veil over KwaZulu-Natal

Clouds gather against the Drakensberg and draw a veil over KwaZulu-Natal where intertribal wars brought death and suffering to the beautiful foothills considerable ability, but his savagery in warfare had become a byword.

In 1818 Dingiswayo, Chief of the Mthethwa, decided that Matiwane was becoming too powerful. He ordered an attack on him. Matiwane, advised by his spies, prepared for the gathering storm. He asked Mtimkulu, father of Langalibalele and Chief of the amaHlubi, to look after his cattle, and prepared for the worst. In the event, Matiwane, confronted by overpowering forces, capitulated, but he vowed vengeance. Then, to his fury, he found that Mtimkulu was refusing to return his cattle. Mobilising his army once again, he was about to fall upon the amaHlubi, when Zwide, Chief of the Ndwandwe, attacked him from his rear. Caught unprepared, the amaNgwane were utterly routed, and were driven in panic before the exultant Ndwandwe, who burnt and destroyed everything in their path.

Matiwane, deprived now of his cattle and driven from his home, decided to seek a new home. But before setting out, he thought he might as well settle scores with the amaHlubi, who were still holding on to his cattle. After a forced march, and with picked troops, he ringed the Hlubi capital by night, and, as dawn broke, he hurled his troops upon it like a thunderbolt, and slaughtered everyone in it – men, women and children – including Mtimkulu himself. The amaHlubi, under Mtimkulu's brother, Mpangazitha, fled for their lives, and headed straight for the Drakensberg, only to find the amaZizi already in occupation.

That is what Xan-xeib the Bushman had seen from his lofty cave. That is why, on a day late in 1818, the peaceful amaZizi awoke to the spine-chilling battle cry of the amaHlubi, and the peace of the valleys was shattered with the roar of battle and the screams of women and children.

Some of the amaZizi fled higher up into the mountains, finding a refuge in the impenetrable valleys, and thereby clashing with the Bushmen. Some turned south, along the wall of the Drakensberg, crossed the headwaters of the emZimkhulu, and finally disappeared for ever, absorbed by the amaMpondo of the eastern Cape. And a few turned northwards, crossed the Drakensberg at Basuto Gate along the path the amaTheza had taken 120 years before, and joined their clansmen in Lesotho and the north-eastern Free State.

But worse was to come. Hard upon the heels of the amaHlubi came the avenging hordes of the amaNgwane, under Matiwane, hacking their way westwards in their search for a new home. Once again the valleys and the foothills of the Drakensberg rang to the sound of battle, and night after night the leaping flames roared up into the night sky, as Matiwane and his men fell upon the amaHlubi.

The amaHlubi, in their turn, fled. "There was a white mark from the uThukela to Thaba'Nchu," said an aged member of the amaHlubi tribe, "and that mark was our bones." In their blind terror some, like the amaZizi, forced their way deeper into the recesses of the Drakensberg. The bulk of them, those whose corpses did not lie whitening in the long grass, fled northwards under Mpangazitha, in the tracks of the fleeing amaZizi, and, in their turn, entered the wide lands of the eastern Free State and the mountains of Lesotho.

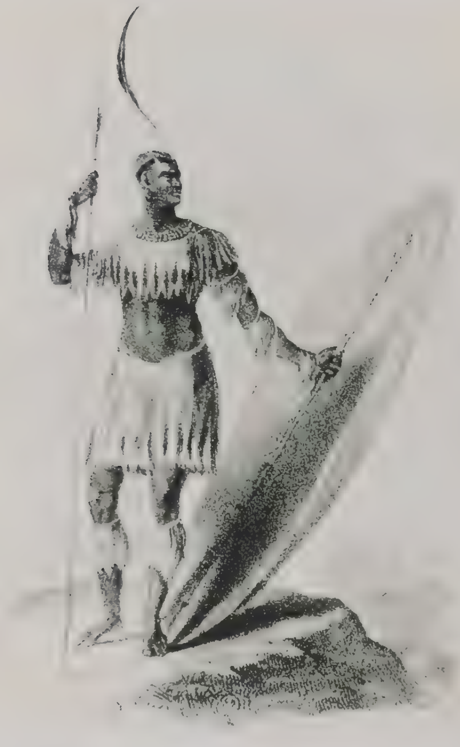
And then, for 10 long years the whole of this lovely country, the country of the Malutis and the Caledon River in the north-eastern Free State, was ravaged by war after war, the wars of the Mfecane, when amaHlubi fought amaZizi, amaZizi fought the Bafokeng, the Bafokeng fought the Bakwena, and all together fought the local Batlokwa under Queen Mantatisi.

Down in the Drakensberg the fires still burned. The whole stretch of country from Mont-aux-Sources to Giant's Castle was ravaged and looted – the valley of the Mnweni, where the Ntonjelana dances in the sunlight, the broad uplands of the uMhlwazini, and the green valley of the Sterkspruit, under the shadow of Cathkin Peak. And it was here, in the valley of the Sterkspruit, in front of brooding Cathkin, that Matiwane, sated with slaughter, paused, saw the shining valley and found in it his new home.

But only for four short years. It was Matiwane, this time, who was to have his peace disturbed. Once again from the plains to the north-east came the terrifying sound, the thunder of marching men, and for the third time in five years the turmoil of invasion came to the Drakensberg. This time it was uShaka.

When, four years previously, Dingiswayo had set out to destroy Matiwane, his armies had been under the command of a young Zulu chief. His name was uShaka. Dingiswayo died late in the year 1818, and by 1822 uShaka had absorbed the Mthethwa into his own tribe. The curtain had rung up on a new act in the great drama.

uShaka was certainly one of the most remarkable characters ever to be thrown up in the troubled waters of South African history. He can only be described as a savage – if brilliant – conqueror, one of the greatest military geniuses Africa has ever known. He re-organised, first, his small Zulu army, and later the army of the whole Mthethwa tribe.



King uShaka

One of his first innovations was to replace the long throwing spear with the short, stabbing assegai, and to provide his men with a larger shield. Thus equipped, the Zulu warrior would rush up to his enemy, hook the left side of his own shield round the left side of his opponent's, and wrench it aside, thus exposing the left armpit. Into this he would plunge his spear, right to the heart, and withdraw it as his enemy fell. He was then ready for the next man. To return from battle without his spear meant instant death.

uShaka adapted the well-known encircling movement, used in hunting game, as his major tactic – the dreaded encircling horns. He also developed a much fiercer type of warfare, where no quarter was given. In the past, tribal warfare in Zululand had been a rather pleasant affair, very similar to the medieval jousts and tournaments in Europe. Neither side wished to inflict serious damage on their respective opponents. After much shouting and clashing of sticks, with a few warriors tumbled in the dust, honour was satisfied, and each side would withdraw. uShaka changed all this. It was now war to the death, the sudden, unannounced strike in the night, the wholesale massacre of men, women and children. He made his men fight barefoot, for greater mobility. Like all great commanders, he gave tremendous care and thought to the comfort and well-being of his men. They were well supplied with meat. Boys of 14 and 15 were enrolled in a special corps of *uDibi*, military orderlies or batmen, one for every three fighting men. It was their task to carry the sleeping mats, dry fuel, and food for the troops, so that, unlike others, uShaka's men were always warm and well fed. Their morale was consequently high. The devotion of his men exceeded that of the Roman legions, while their ferocity outstripped that of the Goths and Huns. uShaka appointed as their commanders only men whom he could trust implicitly. As an architect of victory, he was incomparable.

But he was savage and merciless. The penalty for failure in battle was instant death. To test the devotion of his men on one occasion, he ordered a whole regiment to hurl themselves over a cliff. To a man, they obeyed. Giving the royal salute, "*Bayete!*" they leapt to destruction.

uShaka had never forgotten Matiwane, now living peacefully in the Cathkin area. There came a day in 1822 when he decided to wipe Matiwane from the face of the earth. The order was issued from the Royal ikhande (military kraal) at kwaDukuza to march.

The impis (armies) under uShaka's general Mdlaka assembled with their long cowhide shields and their magnificent feathered headdresses, their stabbing assegais and their heavy knobkerries. Slowly at first, and then with increasing speed, they streamed out of the royal gates, westwards, with their long loping tread.

Matiwane looked up one day, from under the shadow of Cathkin Peak. Away in the distance he saw the slopes of the rising ground beyond the Injisuthi River. They were black with moving men. The noise of their coming was as the rustling sound of a swarm of locusts, menacing, terrifying. And for the third time the dark peaks of uKhahlamba were etched black against a flaming sky.

Matiwane fled. No man could withstand the mighty hammer-blows of uShaka's impis. He fled, first of all, into the Mnweni area, and there gathered his forces. He thought his front would be well protected by the uThukela and uMlambonje Rivers. In an emergency he would be able to escape over the Drakensberg into Lesotho via the headwaters of the uMhlwazini and Didima rivers. Mdlaka, however, came up behind Arthur's Seat (Mpimbo), with another arm of his forces over the Rockeries, and down the Magangangozi, thus cutting off his escape route. In the ensuing battle Matiwane just managed to escape, still northwards. Once again the pass at Basuto Gate saw the long line of fleeing men making for Witsieshoek and the plains of the eastern Free State, and the armies of Matiwane were now flung into the already vast cauldron of the Mfecane ("The Crushing").

The resulting chaos staggers the imagination. Says E.A. Ritter, in *Shaka Zulu*, "The pitiless cruelty and unspeakable brutality of these intertribal wars of annihilation baffle description". Ellenberger said, "The ruin and devastation that spread over the north-eastern Free State and northern Lesotho was one of the greatest in the history of the world." And Makonosoang, then an old man, told Ellenberger: "I lived on roots, grass seed, and even ate pot-clay to try thereby to stay my hunger. The hand of the amaNgwane was heavy on the land. All the tribes were at war with each other."

Down in the Drakensberg it was almost as bad. uShaka's warriors went on the rampage. Tribe after tribe was driven westwards, came up against the impenetrable wall of the Drakensberg, and there either perished or were deflected north or south. Those who went north were swallowed up in the wars of the Mfecane, and disappeared from sight. Those who turned south followed the wall of the Drakensberg, crossed the headwaters of the emKhomazi, the emZimkhulu and the emZimvubu, and finally ended up in Pondoland and the north-eastern Cape. In this way the amaThembu arrived, spent a brief while in the valleys and gorges of the Drakensberg, were driven out, and headed south. They were followed by the amaChunu, under Macingwane. With the amaThembu they ultimately formed part of the Pondo nation. Their descendants may be found today in the Transkei. Year after year a flood of terrified humanity rolled south-westwards towards the hills and valleys of the Drakensberg. The whole of this lovely country was in an uproar.

Some decided to stay on and fight it out from their tenuous refuges in the deep-cut valleys of the Little Berg. There were still a few of the amaZizi left, and these were joined by the scattered remnants of the amaHlubi and amaNgwane. The Fern Forest, in the Cathedral area, was one such hide out. To this day the forest is still known to blacks as eMagwaleni[1].

Climbing one day in the Mont-aux-Sources area, I found myself on a narrow ledge, halfway up one of the sandstone rock faces of the Little Berg. Here I found a whole collection of grinding stones and clay pots, similar to those made by the amaNgwane. Some were grouped around what must once have been a fireplace. By digging I managed to uncover several more. This must have been one of the hideouts of a group of either amaZizi or amaNgwane. They could not have chosen a better position. In front was a screen of small trees. There was only one way up to the ledge – the chimney up which I had climbed, and the whole position commanded a magnificent view of the broad valley, 300 m below. As a defensive position it was completely impregnable. I brought one of the pots down with me, and it was later identified by the Natal Museum as being almost certainly of amaNgwane origin, and about 130 years old.

By 1823 the whole of Natal was completely devastated. From a population of about a million it had shrunk to less than 3 000. Farewell went even further. In 1824 he described the territory made over to him by uShaka as containing "not more than three or four hundred souls". Theal states that when Retief and his Voortrekkers came down the passes of the Drakensberg in 1837 they encountered no sign of human habitation between the Drakensberg and Port Natal, a distance of 240 km. "The ten years of Shaka's reign," says Professor Hattersley, "represent a period of ruin and disaster in south-eastern Africa."

And then, to add to the horrors of that dreaded time, the few remaining people in this once lovely land took to cannibalism. Their main stronghold was in the mountain fastness of Job's Kop, or eLenge, in the Wasbank district. Some historians have conjectured that it was only here that this grim practice flourished, but there is ample evidence that by 1825 it had spread throughout western KwaZulu-Natal, into the Drakensberg, and on into the eastern Free State and northern Lesotho. In the Drakensberg the Duga clan, under Mdavu, had sought refuge in the more inacessible caves, and cannibalism was rife amongst them. The

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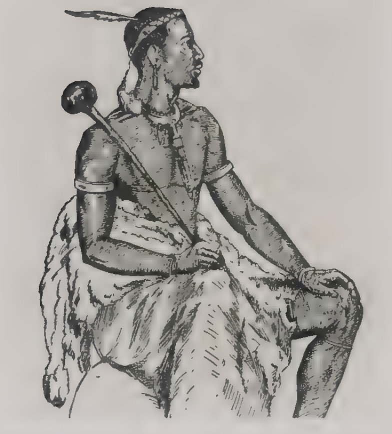
[1] Different interpretations give name as "Coward's Bush" and "The Place of the Fugitives".



Chief Moshoeshoe Courtesy Free State Archives Depot

amaZizi, the amaHlubi and the amaNgwane all followed suit. The Bele tribe was especially noted for this practice. Renowned cannibal leaders were Mahlaphahlapha at the dreaded Job's Kop: even he eventually found his way into the pot. Chief Sidinane had his headquarters close to the present Royal Natal National Park, and visitors are still taken to the famed Cannibal Caves, where he lived[1]. Luphalule had his stronghold in a cave on the farm Freiburg, near Helpmekaar. Here, to this day, you can see a huge, flat stone on which victims were slaughtered after having been hamstrung, and the marks on the stone where the knives were sharpened. People dared not move about, except in large, armed parties, and preferably at night. Strangers had hardly any chance at all. Victims would first be hamstrung, and kept in the "pantry" until needed. Then they would be killed, often with a twist of the neck, cut up, skinned and roasted or grilled. If no other victims could be found, they ate their own wives and children, and exchanged them with each other.

As late as 1836 Chief Balule, son of Mahlaphahlapha, who went into the pot at Job's Kop, still ate human flesh in his lair on the Upper uThukela River, and in the same year, when M. Arbousset, the French missionary, came to Lesotho, he found cannibalism still rife there. Mokapakapa, a Mosotho, was quite open about it. He told M. Arbousset how he, his three wives, his children and his servants had been captured by a cannibal tribe. They were driven like sheep to the slaughter. "They called my children two pretty lambs, their mothers they denominated three cows, my servants three oxen, and myself an eland. These words were our death warrant. My mother, my wives, my children and my servants were killed before my eyes, cut into pieces, cooked in dishes, or roasted on the coals, until the last morsel of them was devoured. It was only to my leanness that I owed my life."

Sikwate, who lived in the Cathkin area, told the Witwatersrand University Archaeological Expedition in 1931 that his grandfather had left his four wives concealed in a cave in the area when he set out on a military expedition. On his return he found that all four had been discovered and eaten!

Many historians attribute this particular outbreak of cannibalism to the wars of uShaka, but although cannibalism reached its height during this period, these wars were not the cause of it. It first raised its head during the great famine of 1802. Even this is not the complete answer. It has been proved elsewhere that cannibalism is not always accompanied by an absence of food. Torday and Joyce have pointed out that many of the tribes of the western Congo which were particularly addicted to cannibalism came from districts where food, both animal and vegetable, was particularly abundant. And why cannibalism, when vast herds of game were still roaming the plains of Natal and the hills and valleys of the Drakensberg? It would almost seem as if periodically a strange, unaccountable madness seizes on certain races, a madness which suppresses all decent human instincts, all reason, all natural desire for fellowship, all intellect and compassion, everything which raises a human being above the brute beast.

We might also ponder briefly here another curious fact. Why is it that practically all the great migrations in human history, all the savage invasions, from Genghis Kahn, the Goths, the Huns, down to the vast Bushman and abaNtu migrations, the wars of uShaka, the invasions of the Drakensberg, why have they all been in a southerly and westerly direction, and practically never in a northerly and easterly direction? The colonisation of America, the irruption westwards into the Indian Ocean by Japan in 1942 (why did she not strike east and attack the western coast of America?) all follow the same pattern. Even today the greatest external threat to western civilisation is looming up over the eastern horizon! In truth, the call has always been: "Go west, young man!"

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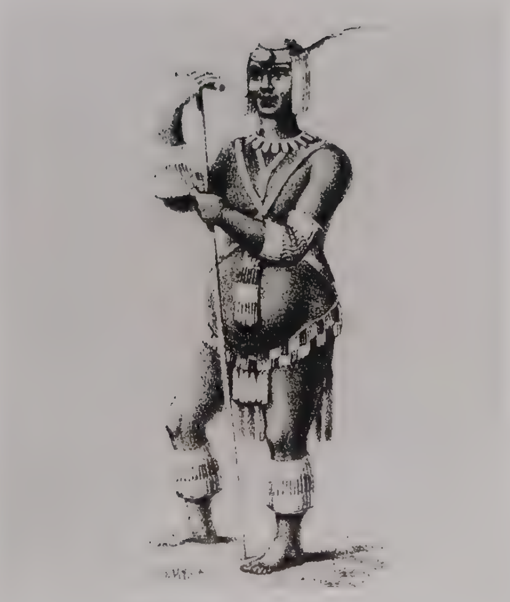
[1] He was still alive in 1870, when Dr J. W. Matthews visited the area. See page 141.

And what is it, in any case, that, down through the ages, has triggered off periodically these vast irruptions? Some would say overpopulation, and we have already noted that it was probably this that started off the chain reaction of the Drakensberg invasions. But it would seem to go deeper than that. It would seem that, deep down below the surface of humanity, is a compulsive force, long battened down, which every now and then bursts forth, and the world stands appalled at the fury unleashed. And afterwards? Desolation, ruin, but in a very strange way there is an ultimate cleansing, a cathartic regeneration, as humanity renews its upward march. The boil, long suppressed, suddenly bursts through the resisting flesh. But that is not the important thing. What is important is the renewed health of the body that follows. And so the long agony of uShaka's wars was eventually woven into the warp and woof of a new South Africa.

And the long agony was almost over. Amid the vast turmoil of the Mfecane, in the lands that lay beyond the Drakensberg, one man emerged as a rock in turbulent seas: Moshoeshoe, of the Bakoni clan, son of an insignificant chieftain, Peete, determined to bring peace to his people by uniting all the warring clans, welding them into a nation and expelling the invaders. A man of vision and statesmanship, all he lacked was the power. But he had heard of the mighty uShaka, beyond the peaks of the Drakensberg, and his impis. He would appeal to him for help.

And so, on a winter's day in 1823, a group of horsemen might have been seen making their way down the Pass of the Qola la Masoja, which we today call the Organ Pipes Pass, in the Cathedral area. The snows had been heavy that year, and the going was hard. They carried with them gifts of ostrich plumes, and feathers of crane and finch, and otter and jackal skins. In command was Khoho, the special emissary of Moshoeshoe, and he was on his way to uShaka.

Slowly they made their way down the pass, and then more swiftly through the foothills and across the rolling plains that led to kwaDukuza, the Royal Kraal near Stanger. Three months later they were back, with a present of 50 head of cattle for Moshoeshoe, and a promise that uShaka would march.



Dingane in his dancing dress Durban Local History Museum

Early in 1826 the army set off, under Dingane and Mhlangana, and soon the Pass they ascended, which we call today Van Reenen's Pass, heard the tramp of marching feet, as the impis, company upon company, streamed relentlessly up and over the mountains. Line upon line they came, endlessly, and the noise of their coming startled the black eagle high on his lonely crag. Then on, through Witsieshoek, into the eastern Free State, across the Caledon, to their first confrontation with Matiwane, at Likhoele[1]. Again they met, at Kolonyama, and yet again near the present Ladybrand. In this last battle Dingane and Matiwane met face to face for a brief moment, and Matiwane inflicted a near-fatal wound near Dingane's left armpit.

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[1] There is some debate as to whether it was the armies of uShaka or Mzilikazi which finally defeated the amaNgwane. I have followed Ellenberger, Ritter and Bryant, the latter admitting to a small doubt in his mind.

But by this time Matiwane had had enough, and he fled with all his men and with what cattle he was able to save, southwards. Through Mohaleshoek they went, and then down into the north-eastern Cape. Here he was turned back by the guns of the white man, under Colonel Somerset. For Matiwane it was the end of the road: he was utterly routed. He had trekked nearly 1 000 km from his old home in the hills of Zululand. Now, broken in heart, weary, and sick for home, he and the remaining handful of his followers turned and headed north again. Threading his way once more down the pass at Basuto Gate, which he had climbed so confidently six years before, he passed again, for the last time, under the shadow of the Amphitheatre, and so out into the plains of Natal. Early in 1829 he reached home.

Here he found Shaka dead, and Dingane, his old foe, on the throne. Dingane kept him waiting for a few days, and then he sent for him. Suspecting the worst, Matiwane removed his brass armring and handed it to his 14-year-old son, Zikhali, whom he instructed to remain at home. "Where are your people?" asked Dingane. "Here they are, all that are left of them," was the reply. "Then take them away," Dingane ordered. They were led away, and each man had his neck broken by a violent twist of the head.

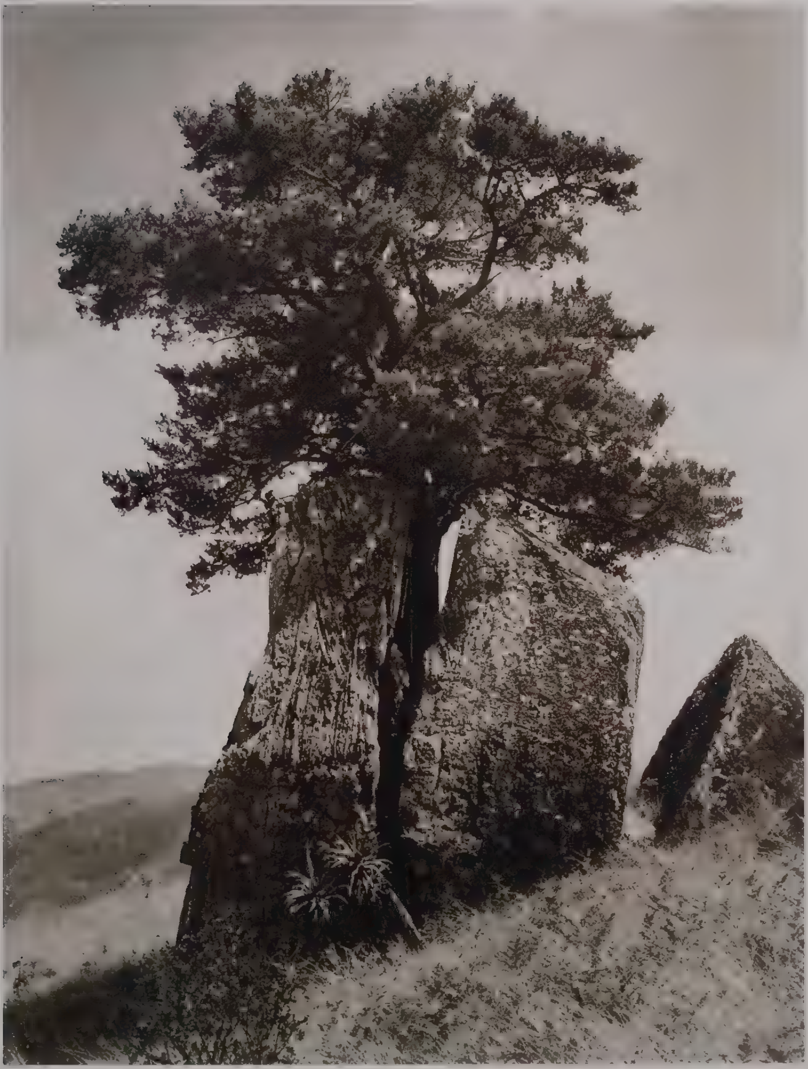
Then, turning to Matiwane, baring his breast and pointing to the old wound near his left armpit, Dingane asked gently, "Knowest thou that wound, son of Masopha?" "Yes, Chief," came the answer, "it is mine." These were his last words. They first put out his eyes, and then killed him by forcing sticks up his nostrils into the brain.

So died Matiwane, son of Masopha, annihilator of the amaHlubi and the amaZizi, and scourge of the Drakensberg. We need not mourn his passing. "During his lifetime," says Ellenberger, "he had brought ruin and devastation and death to many thousands of people over a vast tract of country, and it is hard to feel much pity for him."

The subsequent history of the main actors in this drama need not detain us long. Moshoeshoe went on to become the father of his people, to weld the various Sotho tribes into a great nation in the mountain country of Lesotho, where they live in relative peace and contentment to this day. uShaka, as we have seen, was dead, assassinated by his two brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, on 22 September 1828, only a few short months before the return of Matiwane. In KwaZulu, men still speak his name with awe. Zikhali, the young man to whom Matiwane handed his brass armring, we shall meet again, and we shall also meet again another young man, Langalibalele, son of Mtimkulu, Chief of the amaHlubi.

In the Drakensberg, after the vast devastation, with the long agony over at last, life began once more to emerge. Men came down again from the heights into the valleys and the plains, and started to cultivate anew the ruined fields. The refugees came out of the eMagwaleni forest, and once again built their huts in the valley of the uMlambonje. The amaZizi and the amaNgwane, what was left of them, came out of their hiding places and settled in the Mnweni and the ubuSingatha and the Injisuthi. You may see their descendents today in the Upper uThukela and in the Injisuthi area. We shall see in a later chapter how Zikhali, son of Matiwane, returned to his people and rebuilt much of their later power, and of how Langalibalele, son of Mtimkulu of the amaHlubi, re-established his people in the area north of Giant's Castle. Slowly the beehive huts were rebuilt, and the smoke from the cooking fires curled up lazily again in the still mountain air, and the valleys echoed once again to the calls of the herdboys as they tended their cattle on the green hillsides.

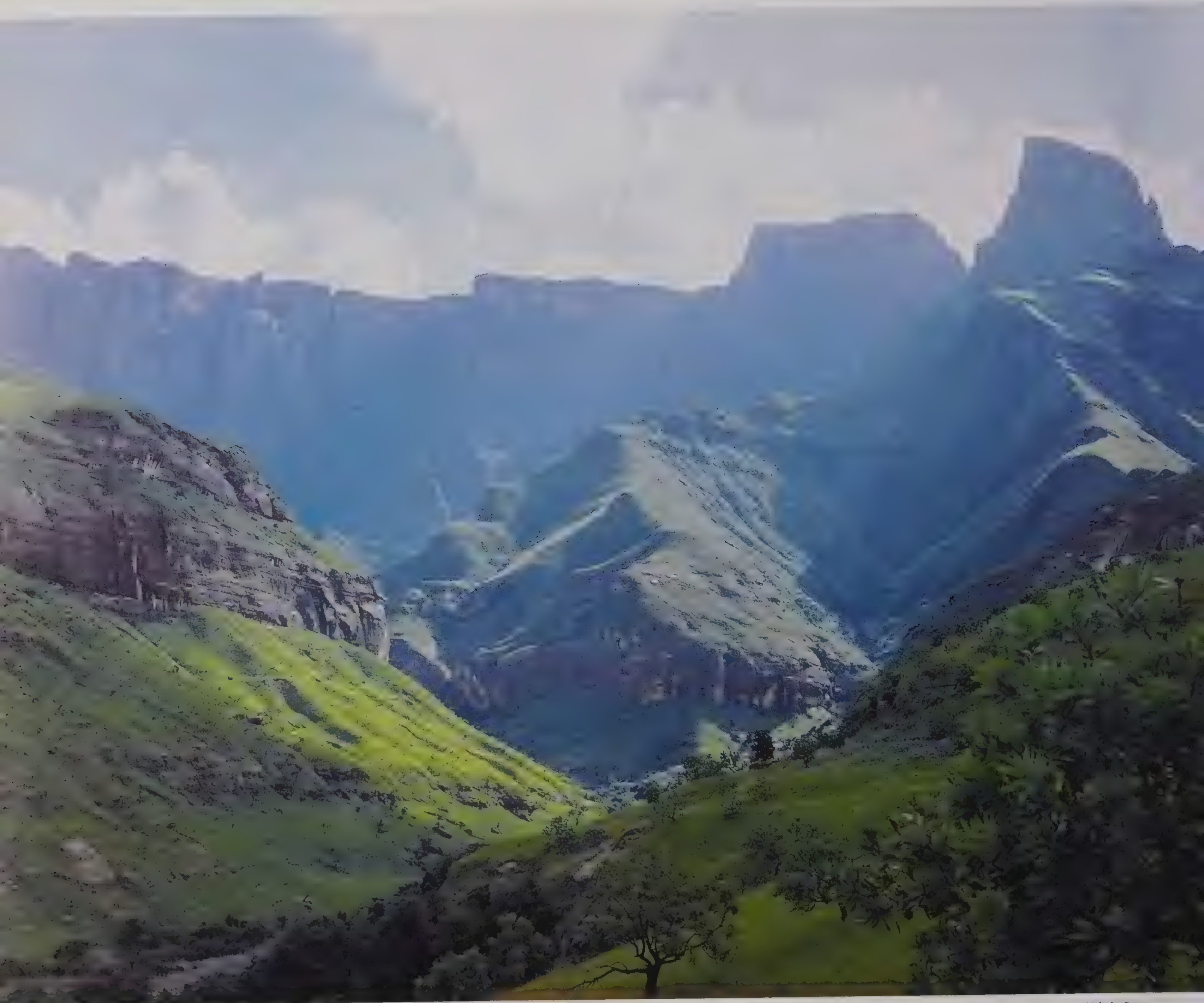
And what of the Bushmen all this time? Hemmed in by the anvil of the iron wall of the Drakensberg behind them, and the mighty hammer-blows of the Zulu impis in front, they fought a grim and desperate battle for life. But worse was to come. To these two pressures, two more were to be added, two lateral thrusts this time, one from the north as the Voortrekkers wound their way down the slopes of the Drakensberg, and one from the south, as the English settlers pressed up from Port Natal, hemming them in yet closer. Their doom was sealed.



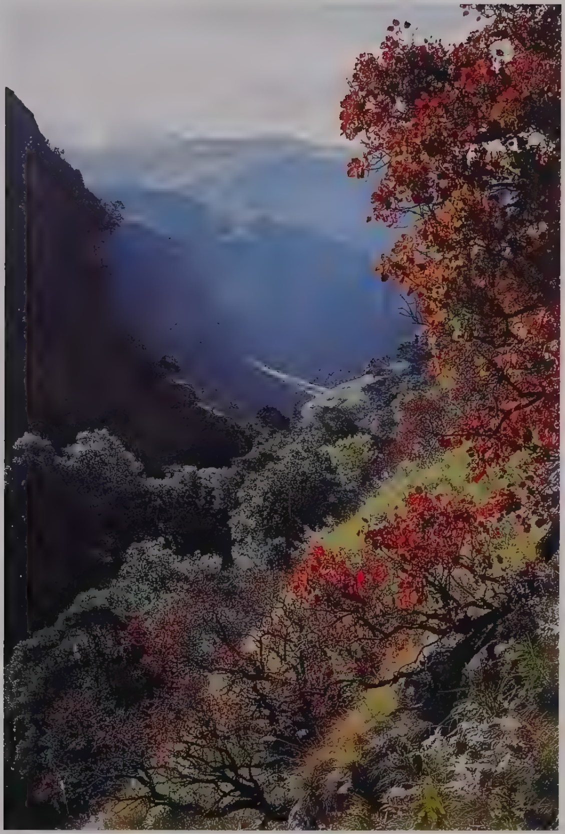
Malcolm Pearse

A Hand of Stone

A huge sandstone boulder in the Cathedral Peak area, like some giant hand, protects a 100-year-old yellowwood tree



Malcolm Pearse



Malcolm Pearse

Peaceful Valleys

Above: In the steep-sided valleys of the Injisuthi, Bushman families made their homes in sandstone caves, particularly caves close to water.

Left: The imposing Sentinel, at the northern end of the Amphitheatre, stands guard over the Royal Natal National Park

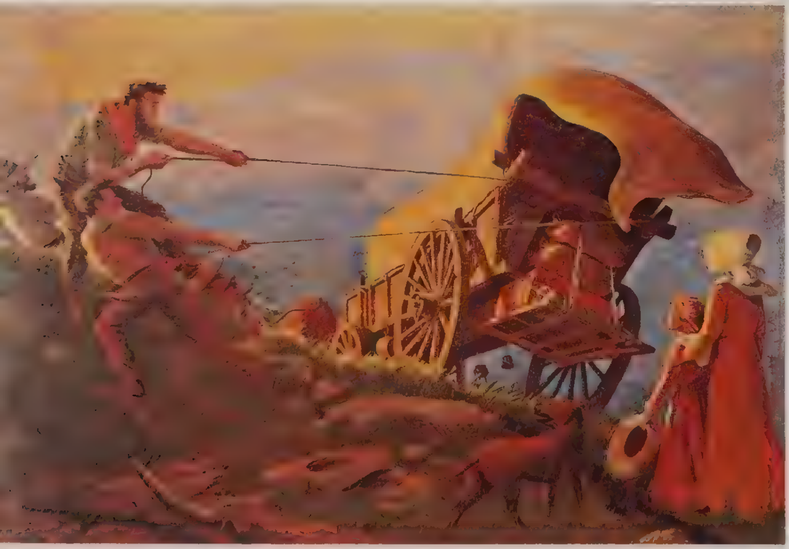
CHAPTER 3

THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

> *Say not the struggle naught availeth,*
> *The labour and the wounds are vain.*
> A.H. Clough

On 14 November 1837, the first creaking wagons of the Voortrekkers began their slow and lumbering descent of the Drakensberg.

After months of trekking across the arid veld of the Free State, they had crossed the Eland's River, and had come to a land "rich in water and grass and very fruitful". Eyes which had grown weary with gazing on the winter plains saw with delight the new green grass of spring, the rushing mountain streams, and the mountains themselves, standing in silent majesty on the edge of the great escarpment. Huge koppies, isolated and boulder-strewn, with their sandstone pinnacles, stretched as far as the eye could see. And everywhere there were flowers, dew-drenched and swaying softly in the cool air – red, blue, yellow and white. Especially notable was a large red one they had never seen before, probably one of the *Brunvigias*. The scent of the flowers invaded even their laager, and in their joy they called their camping site Bloemendal.



A painting by W. Coetzer depicting Boer families descending the Drakensberg

Firewood was plentiful, and there they collected all the scattered wagons, 54 of them altogether, deciding to remain for several months while Piet Retief, their leader, set out to explore the route to Port Natal. They had arrived at a spot 40 km north-east of Mont-aux-Sources, midway between this latter point and Van Reenen's Pass.

Retief set out on Friday, 6 October, with four wagons and 14 men, riding steadily for the rolling landscape of Natal. Standing on the edge of the escarpment, before commencing the descent, he gazed down on what he described as the fairest view in Africa he had ever seen. To his right stretched the long cloud-capped line of the Drakensberg, culminating in the mighty precipices of Sentinel Peak and the Amphitheatre. To his left the slopes were gentler, in all their spring glory, and in front, 700 m below him, like a crumpled carpet, lay the hills and valleys of Natal.

Retief was away for seven weeks altogether. He arrived at Port Natal, a squalid little place with only one stone building, another of wood, and a few rude hovels and African huts, on 20 October. In the meantime the rest of the Voortrekkers spent their time hunting, exploring the countryside, and searching for possible passes down the mountains. On Saturday, 21 October, they shifted their laager to Kerkenberg, nearer the edge of the escarpment, and here, on Sunday, 12 November, Retief's 22-year-old daughter, Deborah, painted his name on a large rock in green paint. It was her father's 57th birthday. The name can still be seen there to this day.

The next day they started to move, leaving Kerkenberg and outspanning three hours later on the edge of the Drakensberg. An air of suppressed excitement pervaded the whole camp, and that night, at evening prayers, Erasmus Smit, the dominee, in his enthusiasm expounded no less than five psalms! Next day, Tuesday, 23 wagons inspanned and descended the face of the Drakensberg, using chains on each wheel to brake the wagons. By sunset 18 wagons were down. One wagon was badly damaged, and four others had been unable to make it, but there had been no injury to man or beast. Next day several Trekkers returned to the summit and helped these five wagons down, and in the late afternoon six more wagons arrived.

Erasmus Smit

Diary of Erasmus Smit, Ed. H.F. Schoon

It was an epic undertaking. North-east of Mont-aux-Sources, of course, the Drakensberg is nothing like as terrifying as it is further south. Here the sheer precipices give place to rolling slopes and deep-cut valleys, but even so it was enough to appal the stoutest heart.

The pass they had discovered is the one a kilometre or so south-west of Bezuidenhout Pass, known as Step Pass. The news soon spread, and within a few days wagons from all directions were converging on this and on two other suitable passes discovered later, Bezuidenhout Pass and De Beer's Pass.

With back wheels locked, men heaved and strained and battled on long ropes and trek chains to act as brakes and to prevent the wagons from toppling over. The green slopes and the krantzes rang to the shouts of men, the cries of the drivers and the *voorloopers*, the whip-lash crack of the *voorslae*, and the creaking and groaning of the wagons as they snaked their way down the long slopes. Baggage and chests were all lashed fast to the wagons. Women and children walked down, the old, the sick and the decrepit carried on rough stretchers, friends walking alongside them. They were an exultant and joyous crowd of men and women, entering upon a new and unexplored world of mountain, stream and valley. Every step was a discovery.

All that week and the next they poured down into Natal. Sometimes as many as 100 wagons went down in a day. By the time Retief rejoined them at the end of November, close on 1 000 wagons were spread out along the uThukela and its tributaries.

Only one aged Boer doubted. Looking out late one afternoon he watched the long shadows of the Sentinel and of the Amphitheatre sweeping over the hills and valleys of Natal as the sun went down behind them. Lifting up his aged head he said in solemn tones: "Woe to the land that has shadows on its borders!" And the shadows *were* there. In a few short months Retief and his men would be dead, and Weenen, Vegtlaager and Blaaukrantz would be written in tears across the pages of South African history. With happier prophetic insight, as he looked at the green slopes and the toppling crags down which the wagons were coming, he might have seen, in the blue sky above, his own descendants in their silvery aircraft, flying back and forth over the mountains searching for a pass to carry the mighty four-lane tarred freeway from the Midlands of Natal into the plains of the Free State, and so on to the teeming metropolis of the Witwatersrand.

And so the Trekkers came to the well-watered country and the pleasant hills and valleys of north-western Natal, and here they played out their drama to the magnificent backdrop of the Drakensberg Mountains. Slowly the white-tented wagons began to fan out, southwards and eastwards and westwards. Many turned west to the beckoning mountains of uKhathlamba, and soon parties of mounted Trekkers must have ridden up into the valleys of the Little Berg, and gazed in awe at the mountain splendour which opened out before their astonished eyes. By the end of 1837 several hundred wagons had spread out along the upper waters of the uThukela and its tributaries. By February 1838 the Blaaukrantz and Bushman River valleys had been occupied.

In June 1838 Gert Maritz established his laager on the left bank of the Injisuthi, or Little uThukela River, at the point where the present Loskop road crosses it. It must have been this party of Trekkers who were among the first to explore this section of the Drakensberg, for from Maritz's laager it was nothing more than a pleasant day's ride up the broad valley of the Injisuthi into the heart of this magnificent mountain area. Maritz still had the padre, Erasmus Smit, with him. I hope the good Dominee preached at least one sermon from the text: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help."

The Trekkers soon settled down to their long task of taming a savage land. With a purpose "ribbed and edged with steel", they set their faces to the upward slope. They had a goal which none would live to see, nothing less than the building of a nation, but their very striving was part of the goal, for it is the unending endeavour, the long march upwards, that builds character. Without a goal, without a purpose, man is lost. Fortunate, indeed, were these hardy Trekkers in the Holy Grail they held before their eyes.

A considerable number of them settled in the deserted foothills of the Drakensberg, mainly between the uThukela and the Bushman rivers, and to this day most of the farms in this area have Afrikaans names. It is generally thought, for instance, that David Gray was the first to farm in the Cathkin area, on the site of the present Nest Hotel. This is not so. The farm was originally owned by a Mr Opperman, a Voortrekker, and was called Opperman's Kraal. It changed its name only when David Gray bought it in 1855. The farm, Arthur's Seat, on which the prominent mountain Arthur's Seat (Mpimbo) is situated, was originally called Buffelshoek.

At first it was all a very casual affair. Farms were laid out with very ill-defined boundaries. Little attempt was made to establish attractive homesteads. The Dutch farmers were essentially nomads, and never sent their roots really deep. As late as 1850, many of them were still living in wagons, or in what were known as simple *hardebies* huts. They dressed in moleskins and velskoens, with enormous hats, a metre across, made of wheat straw, and lined with green material. The weight of the finished article was considerable. Their guns were still of the flint and steel type. The women wore voluminous skirts and the traditional *kappie*. So great was their dread of the local tribesmen that all, men and women, are said to have gone to bed in their clothes, ready for emergencies that might arise during the course of the night!

It was a hard and dour life they lived, their only contact with civilisation and the larger world outside being the occasional itinerant *smous*. The *smous* was a sort of wandering trader, bringing to the isolated farmhouses his wares — cheap jewellery, pots and pans, coarse materials, and all the gossip of the towns. Buying was done by barter, the *smous's* goods being exchanged for grain, ivory and skins. The *smous* was the link between the growing towns and the far interior. He must have often visited the Drakensberg areas.

So great was the confusion in the matter of farms that one of the first tasks of the Government in the 1840s was to try and regularise the boundaries. Farms of 243 ha (600 acres) were allotted to all Trekkers who had settled in Natal prior to 1840.

But now a new problem arose. With the death of uShaka and the defeat of Dingane by the Boers, Natal was flooded by a large influx of returning black refugees. By 1846 nearly 100 000 blacks were wandering up and down Natal. Something had to be done, and it was then that the Government established seven so-called Native Reserves, one of which, the Quathlamba Reserve, was in the Drakensberg. But again, there were no defined boundaries. A map of Natal prepared in 1853 by C.J. Cato, marks the whole of the area between Giant's Castle and Mont-aux-Sources along the line of the Berg simply as Quathlamba Location, with no boundaries, but, as we have already seen, there were already a number of Trekker farms in the area. This resulted in a good deal of dissatisfaction among the Trekkers, and a mass exodus into the Transvaal occurred, where land was free, and where 3 240 ha (8 000 acre) farms could be laid out. Many Trekker farms were sold to English colonists.

In 1848 Sir Harry Smith promised to investigate Trekker grievances, and in the ensuing years an attempt was made to stabilise the position. A proper police force was established to check Bushman raids, and an attempt made to define properly the Native Reserves. In 1849 the ill-defined Quathlamba Location was split up into three well-defined reserves (discussed in this chapter and Chapter 23).

The first English settlers had come to Port Natal 13 years before the Voortrekkers descended the Drakensberg. Slowly they began to spread inland, but it was not until the 1840s that they began to arrive in the Drakensberg. In contrast to the somewhat rootless Boer occupation, these English settlers began to establish themselves much more securely. Farms were laid out with a sense of permanence, and many are still occupied today by the descendants of these same hardy pioneers. Then, in the years 1849-1851 came an influx of nearly 5 000 settlers of British origin, and Natal was transformed from a simple rural community of Afrikaans farmers into a far more complex and varied community.

We cannot, of course, follow in detail this steady progress throughout

Natal. It will be sufficient if we trace the origins of some of the men and women who have left their mark on the Drakensberg.

Much of the early settlement took place on the coast, around Pietermaritzburg, and at York, Byrnetown, Richmond, and so on. But early on the country around Lidgetton and the Dargle and from there towards the Drakensberg, attracted the attention of many of the early settlers. This is magnificent country, a country of soft meadowlands, of deep forests, and of clear, bubbling mountain streams. John Shedden Dobie, in his *Journal*, talks of yellowwoods more than 1,5 m in diameter in this area. Winters were cold and brisk, but in summer the sun shone day after day in a cloudless sky. As a boy I used to spend my summer holidays in these lovely parts, on my uncle's farm next to Kilgobbin, ancestral home of the Fannins, and I have never forgotten those carefree days, the soft rolling downs, the gloom of the forests, and the mists that crept silently up at night, and shrouded the forest trees in mystery. The area was given the name Dargle by Thomas Fannin, after the Dargle stream south of Dublin, from where he came.

He had left England with his wife and family in June 1845. After spending two years in the Cape and prospecting for a time in South West Africa, he and the rest of his family sailed for Natal in the *Flora*, arriving at Port Natal in December 1847. After two days at the Port they set out for Pietermaritzburg, the journey taking them six days. In February 1848 they arrived in the area we have already described.

It was wild and unknown country. On their way up from Pietermaritzburg they passed only two deserted Dutch farmsteads. Though there was a drift of sorts over the Umgeni, Howick had not yet been laid out. But the country was lovely beyond telling.

Here Thomas and his young wife settled, found their roots, and started the business of raising a family. They bought a 2 428 ha farm, Buffels Bosch, from a Methodist missionary, and renamed it Kilgobbin. Wherever you went on the farm you were never out of sound of splashing water, and it was surrounded by indigenous yellowwood and sneezewood forests. The country between them and the Drakensberg was no man's land.

Thomas and his wife had 11 children altogether, and for 100 years and more this gifted family served Natal in a variety of ways. John Eustace, the third son, became a land surveyor and ultimately a magistrate and a justice of the peace. In December 1873 he was employed by the Government, after the Langalibalele "Rebellion", to report on the passes of the Drakensberg, with a view to blowing them up and rendering them impassable. He was accompanied by 40 blacks and six white volunteers for his protection, and was one of the first whites to make a thorough exploration of the Drakensberg. He died in 1905.

George Fox, the second son, became a noted plant collector and pioneer botanist in Natal. The lovely creamy-white Drakensberg anemone, *Anemone fanninii*, and the little ground orchid, *Disperis fanniniae*, so common in our Drakensberg forests, are both named after him and his wife.

Meredyth, the fourth son, took over Kilgobbin after the death of his father in 1862, and farmed there for the rest of his life. We shall meet Meredyth again later in this book, for he was one of the Carbineers who took part in the Langalibalele affair.

The fifth daughter, Marianne, married the Venerable Archdeacon Roberts. They had a son, Dr Austin Roberts, author of the well-known classic, *Birds of South Africa*. Emily, the sixth daughter, married Henry Bucknall, another pioneer settler, whom we shall also meet again. Later he and Emily returned to Australia, from where Henry had originally emigrated.

Thomas died on 17 September 1862. His widow survived him for 30 years, dying at Kilgobbin in 1892. Both are buried in the churchyard at Dargle.

Three years after Thomas Fannin bought Kilgobbin, he was joined by Robert Speirs. Born in 1802, Speirs had come out to Natal in the *Conquering Hero*, with his brother James, in 1850. He had brought with him material for a sawmill, and on his arrival he bought a farm on the banks of the Lions River, near the present Lidgetton, from Carl Preller. In 1855 he moved to a new farm, Mount Park, nearer to the Drakensberg. The land between him and the Berg, where the Bushmen lurked, was largely uninhabited. He had three sons, Charles, the eldest, Bob and Alexander. He died in 1879. We shall meet this family again also, for all played a notable part in the opening up of the Drakensberg.

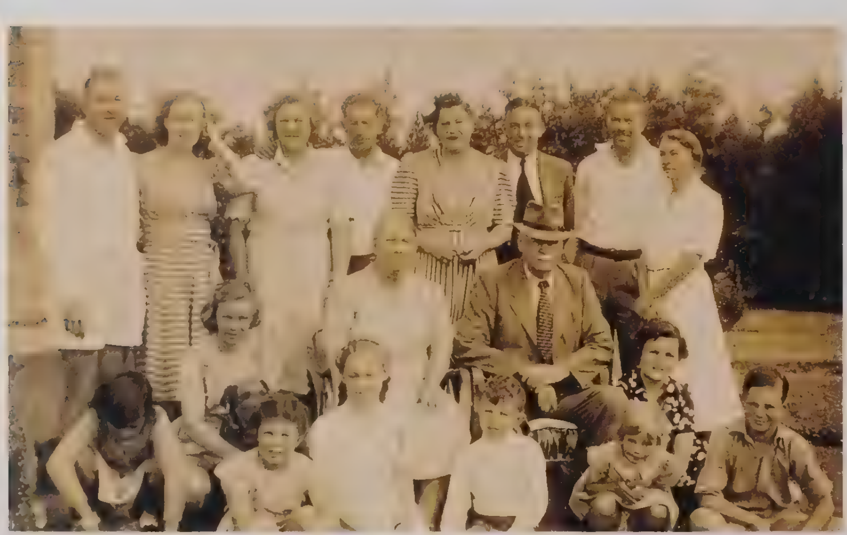
Further north we must notice the arrival, in 1874, of Reverend C.W. Posselt and W. Güldenpfenning, of the Berlin Missionary Society, in what is known today as the Cathedral area of the Drakensberg. They established the Emmaus Mission Station and Hospital for the amaNgwane tribe, and were the first whites to settle there.

In 1850 they were joined by Reverend Karl Edward Zunckel, and for the first time the name Zunckel was associated with the Drakensberg.

Otto Zunckel

No one has done more to open up this mountain region, and for the Drakensberg hotel industry, than the Zunckel family. Reverend K.E. Zunckel emigrated to Natal from Berlin as a Lutheran Missionary. His son Wilhelm farmed in the foothills of the Drakensberg for many years. Wilhelm had seven children, one of whom was the famous Otto Zunckel.

Otto never entered school, and was taught entirely by his parents. As a boy he often helped his father, herding sheep and goats, and sleeping in a huge cave in the Cathkin area, known today as Zunckel's Cave. He married Mathilda Posselt, quiet, smiling and lovely, and they had four children, Walter, Gerald, Udo, and a daughter, Ruth, the youngest. It was Otto and his three sons who did so much for the hotel industry in the Drakensberg, and who took part in many of the dramatic Berg rescues. Time and again they were called out of their beds in the early hours of the morning to go to the help of stranded mountaineers, or to bring back the body of a climber who had fallen to his death. Udo was the first head boy, and first Dux, of my old school, Estcourt High School.



The Zunckel Family: Pioneer hoteliers
Back row from left: Gerald and his wife Lil, Unknown (possibly wife of Walter), Walter, Ruth and her husband, Humphrey Gilbert, and Udo and his wife Urna
Seated: Mathilda and Otto Zunckel
Children in front row: Flavia, Delice, Arlett, Unknown, Anton, Louise Gilbert, Tilly, Otto Gilbert

Reverend Karl Zunckel, the original pioneer, died in 1899. Otto, his grandson, retired from the hotel business in 1940, and bought a farm at the summit of Oliviershoek Pass, where he died in 1947. Three months later Mathilda was killed tragically in a motorcar accident. Udo's son, Anton, for many years carried on the old Zunckel tradition as mine host at Cathkin Park Hotel.

On 21 September 1849 the barque *Aliwal*, 425 tons, left London, bound for Port Natal. On board were a Mr and Mrs David Gray and their four children. The voyage was uneventful until they reached their destination, when, just south of the emKhomazi River, the ship was nearly wrecked on a dangerous shoal. It has since been named the Aliwal Shoal, after David Gray's ship.

David first of all inspected the plot of ground offered him at Richmond, and finding it worthless, decided to trek up-country. They arrived at a farm Greystone, 8 km west of Bushman's River Drift (later Estcourt), towards the Drakensberg. It was owned by Henry Ogle, who had accompanied Fynn in the *Julia* in 1824, the first white men to settle at Port Natal. Later it was owned by Sir Frederick Moor, the last Prime Minister of Natal before Union, and retained by his sons and grandsons for many years. In 1967 the farm was taken over by the Natal Provincial Administration as a game reserve, and named Moor Park. The old homestead was bought by the Veld and Vlei Organisation (based on the famous Outward Bound Schools) as their South African headquarters.

David Gray and his family lived there for about a year, and then moved to Weston, near Mooi River, where they established an hotel (later known as the Bridge Hotel) at the drift where the old main road to the north crossed the Mooi River. Motorists of an older generation, who used to travel the Mooi River-Pietermaritzburg road on their way to Durban, before the building of the present freeway, will recall, with nostalgic memories, this quiet spot, the old hotel, the bridge, and the willow trees.

David Gray Courtesy Mrs Win Gray

Finding hotel life uncongenial, David moved, in 1858, with his wife and now eight children, to the Cathkin area, and there bought a farm from Charles Green which Green had acquired from Opperman the Voortrekker in 1854. This farm, then known as Opperman's Kraal and now as the Nest, was owned by David Gray and his descendants for many generations, and was eventually converted into the Nest Hotel. It has been the Mecca of bowlers and mountaineers for many years. In 1863 Gray moved his homestead a couple of kilometres away to a new site, which he named Cathkin, after Cathkin Braes near Paisley, his home town in Scotland. All that remains of it now are a few ancient oak trees, and the marks of almost obliterated foundations in the long grass.

The Gray family are synonymous with the Cathkin area; they gave the name of their farm to Cathkin Peak, and two of David's descendents still farm in the area. Many of his 10 children played a notable part in the opening up of Natal.

Closely associated with David Gray was Patrick Campbell Sclanders. He arrived in Durban on the *Lord Haddo* on 17 November 1861. After an unsuccessful sheep-farming venture near Weston, on the Mooi River, he too moved to the Cathkin area, took over the Nest, and married David Gray's eldest daughter, Mary, on 30 September 1864. According to Andrew Sclanders, Patrick's son, they had to drive the stock into a stone-walled corral every night and stand guard over them because of lions. Today the name Sclanders, in the Drakensberg areas, is as well-known as that of the Grays and the Zunckels.

One other family is worth noting. In 1860 John Coventry came out to South Africa. Bound for Australia, he landed at Cape Town, and finding no ship available for Australia, and liking the country, he decided to stay. After caring for mental patients on Robben Island for a while, and farming in the Eastern Cape and the Free State, he came to Natal in 1870. He settled in a broad and lovely valley midway between Ladysmith and Bergville. He called it Acton Homes, after his original home at Iron Acton, near Bristol, and with his five sons, started farming there. John's descendents farmed at Acton Homes until the beginning of 2005 when the farm was sub-divided and sold off.

To the east of this valley ran the road over into the Free State, with Dew Drop Inn only a few kilometres away from Acton Homes, where weary travellers were sure of a bed and a cheery yarn from the innkeeper, a Mr Dodds. Dodds kept a tame baboon, which caused immense hilarity to his guests by quaffing beer from a tankard in the pub. After Dew Drop Inn came another inn, Tent Hotel, at the foot of the pass and then came the long climb up the slopes of the Drakensberg.

Patrick Sclanders

Courtesy Mr Barry Sclanders

To return briefly to the Coventrys. In 1903 his grandson, Walter Coventry, bought the farm Goodoo, in the Mont-aux-Sources area, and it was he who first conceived the idea of attracting holiday-makers to the Drakensberg. He started taking in paying guests, and the farm later developed into the Royal Natal National Park Hotel.

And so those early colonists strove and struggled and battled their way upwards, subduing untamed nature to their purposes. They believed, to start with at least, that their motive was only trade, or, in the case of the Trekkers, a love of freedom. They toiled better than they knew. For actually they were obeying, albeit unwittingly, one of the great laws of nature: progress or die. If you remain static, you perish.

And all the time, high up on his rocky eyrie, the Bushman watched ... and wondered ...

Trouble between the Bushmen and the settlers started early, and was inevitable. It was the clash of two irreconcilable cultures.

It is generally believed that the Bushman did not recognise private ownership. The game belonged to all men. So did the white man's cattle — the Bushmen had as much right to shoot these strange new animals as the buck that roamed the mountainsides. But what the Bushman did recognise was territorial rights over hunting land. Each band of Bushmen had its own clearly defined and commonly recognised hunting ground, and its rights to the territory were absolute. For one group to hunt in the territory of another was tantamount to a declaration of war, so that when the white man forbade the Bushman to shoot his cattle and yet went shooting game himself in Bushman territory, war was inevitable. There was also another exacerbating factor: the Bushman hunted only for food, while the white man hunted and killed indiscriminately, for sport or trophies, and this made matters much worse. Finally, as the white man began to shoot out the game, the Bushman found his very livelihood threatened, and the solution was obvious.

"All the game on the plains and on the mountains were ours," Xameb the Bushman told Professor Schoeman. "They were our food, our clothes, and the price with which we won our wives. But then you came, and began shooting until even the vultures could not eat up everything. In those days the law of my people said 'a buck for a buck, a hide in exchange for another hide'. When you thus exterminated our 'cattle', when we saw our children getting thinner from eating puff adders, then we began to aim our arrows at your cattle ... because we wanted to live."

Day after day, year after year, the Bushmen sallied forth from their mountain caves, and raided the lowland pastures of the white man. Always the pattern was the same. At dawn a farmer would discover that his stock had been raided during the night. He would report it to the nearest magistrate's office, who would order out a few police, or perhaps the Carbineers. These, together with a small commando raised from the farmer's neighbours, would set out and follow the spoor. But success in recovering the cattle was rare. All too often, when the pursuit was hot, the Bushmen would slaughter the animals rather than let them fall back into the hands of their rightful owners.

Autumn and winter were favourite periods for raids. The cattle were at their best in the autumn, and better able to endure a long journey, while the harsh winters made pursuit difficult. Cattle would be driven up into the mountains by the steepest and most precipitous paths. A favourite trick was to smear cow dung on the rocks in front of the leading animals, so as to persuade them that others had gone that way before them, and that therefore the route must be practicable. The slaughtering of the animals and the Bushman poisoned arrows infuriated the settlers, and soon it was war to the death. The Bushmen were mercilessly hunted into their lairs like wild animals, and shot down without compunction. None were exempt from slaughter — pregnant women, babies in arms, young and old. Hunted down with dogs like wild beasts, they never surrendered. Quarter was neither asked, nor given.

Every man's hand was against them. In 1852 Charles Barter said of the Bushman raids: "There is but one remedy for this evil — the entire extermination of these Children of the Mist, whom it is impossible to reclaim and difficult to hold in any check." J. Forsyth Ingram said of them: "They were, and are, in almost every respect, beyond the pale of the lowest class of humanity." While there was much talk in Natal in those early days of the white man's duty to "uplift" and "civilise" the black man, not one voice was raised in defence of the Bushman.

It was in the 1840s that the country between the main road to the Transvaal and the Drakensberg began to fill up. Scattered farms began to appear in the Dargle, and all along the line of the Berg. By 1846 the depredations were so bad that it was decided to station a party of mounted men in constant readiness to pursue cattle thieves. The post was to be situated on the farm of Stephanus van Vuuren, in the Elandskop district, near Boston, who had been heavily raided in March of that year. The post would be manned by one NCO and 10 privates of the Cape Mounted Rifles. It was opened in April 1847.

By then the first confrontation between the raiders and the authorities had already taken place. On the night of 5 December 1846, 15 cattle had been stolen from P.G. Pretorius's farm, near Otto's Bluff. The Government decided to act. On 14 December Walter Harding was instructed to take charge of a party of Cape Mounted Rifles and burghers, and to capture the robbers. It was a properly organised expedition, under command of a senior Government official. Soon after they left Pietermaritzburg, an express message was received that Bushmen had just raided C.P.R. Lotter, on the Mooi River. This was a golden opportunity to get between the raiders and the Drakensberg. Patrols were sent out to watch the passes south of Giant's Castle, and camp was set up in the Lotheni Valley. The Bushmen were intercepted, and 15 out of 16 of Lotter's cattle were recovered.

In that same year the Government sent John Shepstone, brother of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, into East Griqualand in an attempt to induce the Bushmen there to submit to a more settled form of life. He failed. The reply of the Bushmen was that their roving life was a happy one, and they did not wish to change it.

On 30 July 1847, a long letter appeared in the *Natal Witness* from

A.W.J. Pretorius, the Trekker leader, who was now farming an hour's ride north of Pietermaritzburg, complaining bitterly of the imbecility of the Government in not putting a stop to the raids. The Fannin and Speirs families, being right on the frontier, were in the thick of it all.

Up to the end of 1847 most of the raids had been in the Pietermaritzburg-Karkloof area, but towards the end of 1847 they shifted to the Bushman's River area. In December 1847 a new military post was established at Bushman's River Drift, which eventually, in 1874, became Fort Durnford, on the outskirts of Estcourt.

That same month, December 1847, 63 horses were stolen in the Bushman's River area. Four Cape Corps men and G. Rudolph set off in pursuit. The raiders were followed up the Bushman's River into the Drakensberg. There the Bushmen turned south, crossed the emKhomazi, and headed for the emZimkhulu. Only six dead horses were seen, and the men were away a whole week.

A year later 200 head of cattle and several horses were stolen from Philip Nel, at Bushman's River. Lieutenant Melville, in command of the new post, together with a large force from the post and Nel himself, set off in pursuit. They followed the spoor right up to the summit of the Drakensberg. It was the first recorded ascent of the Drakensberg from the Natal side by white men. From Melville's description, they appear to have ascended Langalibalele Pass, but we cannot be sure of this. They went over into Lesotho, in the direction of Mokhotlong. Here Melville had to be left behind as he was ill. The rest of the party pursued the Bushmen through unknown country, along the summit to the source of the emZimkhulu, down the Drakensberg, and then in a northerly direction, back to the emKhomazi, the Lotheni and Giant's Castle. They were away three weeks and recaptured a number of horses and cattle.

But the raids continued.

The following March the area was again raided, the target this time being Henry Ogle's farm, Greystone.

By 1849 it was obvious that the policy of establishing military posts at Van Vuuren's and Bushman's River Drift, and of following up individual raids with police and commandos, was failing. The Government therefore decided to implement a long-suggested policy of establishing buffer "native locations" between the settlers and the Drakensberg. In April 1849 Langalibalele and Putini were established in the area between Giant's Castle and Cathkin Peak. Further north were the amaNgwane, under Zikhali, son of Matiwane. Hence arose the three Drakensberg Locations, Nos 1 and 2, and the Upper Tugela Location.

Today the decision to form buffer zones that exposed black tribes to the raids in place of the settlers seems somewhat callous, but there was apparent good reason for the move. With the settlers there was always a long delay in raising a commando with which to pursue the raiders. With the amaHlubi and the amaNgwane this was different. They lived a close-knit, disciplined communal life, and were able to move swiftly against any raiders. The system worked well, with Zikhali, in the north, being particularly successful.

In August 1850 a new military post was established at Spioenkop, near the source of the Umgeni (not to be confused with the more celebrated Spioenkop, on the banks of the uThukela, of Anglo-Boer War fame). Six years later this post was rebuilt and enlarged by the men of the 45th Regiment of the Nottinghamshire and named Fort Nottingham.

In 1851 Robert Speirs reported that the best herd had been carried off from his Lidgetton farm, and that two herd boys had been killed.

From 1852 to 1856 the raids ceased almost entirely in the Bushman's River area, owing largely to the success of the Locations system, and the centre of interest again shifted further south. In 1852 it was the turn of the Cedara district. Fifteen head of cattle were stolen from the farm Boschoek, near the present Cedara College of Agriculture. In 1859 the Government settled Chief Lugaju at Impendhle to act as a buffer between these raiders and the colonists, and a system was also inaugurated whereby young farmers could be called out on commando.

In 1855 the Volunteer movement was started in Natal, to help in the defence of the infant colony. Two regiments were founded, the Durban Volunteer Guard, and the Natal Carbineers. From that time these two regiments, and especially the Carbineers, were used increasingly in checking Bushman raids, in spite of the *Natal Mercury's* caustic reference to "playing at soldiers".

In 1856 the Carbineers had their first "blooding". In March of that year a particularly big raid occurred in the Dargle district. No fewer than 460 head of cattle were stolen. On 5 March a party of nine troopers, under Lieutenant Colonel St George, set out from Pietermaritzburg in pursuit of the raiders. They spent the first night at Tom Fannin's farm, and from there Fannin accompanied them as guide, and they proceeded on to Fort Nottingham. After that they were in what they described as "dreary, desolate and inhospitable country", and they were glad to have Tom Fannin with them. They reached the main Drakensberg, but there

Malcolm Pearse

Injisuthi - Northern Giant's Castle Reserve

The rugged and broken country of the Injisuthi, overlooked by The Old Woman Grinding Corn to the left, with Champagne Castle, Monk's Cowl and Cathkin Peak on the extreme right of the range had to turn back for lack of supplies. Fifty head of cattle had been found butchered on the track.

Eight days later a second patrol of 10 men was sent out under Captain Allen. From Fort Nottingham they headed for Lotheni. They were hampered for most of the way by dense mist and heavy rain, but managed to penetrate well into the Lotheni and up the eastern spur of Giant's Castle. From there they looked down into the deep-cut valley of the Upper Lotheni. Descending this, they followed the river up to its source under the southern precipices of Giant's Castle, a spot which they named Sunday's Kloof, as they reached it on a Sunday. Then, according to them, they "accomplished the climb to the summit of the hill before dark".

They then returned home without having contacted the raiders, after a very wet and exhausting foray.

On one occasion Captain G.A. Lucas and a party of Cape Mounted Rifles had a very narrow escape. They had pursued a group of Bushmen deep into the mountains. That night the men bivouacked round the fire, in a circle with their saddles arranged around them as a laager. Before finally turning in, Captain Lucas strolled outside for a last quiet smoke. Though he could neither see nor hear anything, he felt that eyes were watching him, and he had a queer presentiment of evil. He returned to his men, and instructed them to move out of the circle of the firelight, and to sleep a little way away from the fire. This they did. Next morning 25 poisoned arrows were found within the circle, delivered in the silence and the darkness of the night.

Lucas, incidentally, was one of those colourful characters that seem to adorn Natal's early history. He was the son of the Right Honourable Edward Lucas, Under Secretary of State for Ireland, and, as a Cornet in the 73rd Regiment, had been a survivor of the wreck of the *Birkenhead*. He came to Natal and bought the farm Upper Hilton, and then joined the civil service, selling his farm to Reverend W.O. Newnham, who was looking for a site for the present Hilton College.

In May 1868 the Cathkin area was raided, and the local tribespeople lost heavily. This time the raiders were pursued to the summit of the Drakensberg, and many cattle were recovered, near the source of the Orange River, it was said.

The following year it was the turn of the Cathedral area. On 15 June Mondisa, an Ngwane chief living near the source of the uMlambonje, reported that he had had all his cattle stolen. Captain Allison, the border agent at Oliviershoek, set out immediately with 10 mounted blacks to recover the cattle. They climbed the Drakensberg and followed the spoor well into Lesotho, but failed to catch up with the raiders.

Subsequent raids showed that this district was now to be the target, and that a considerable force of Bushmen had been gathered for the job. The anger of the colonists was exacerbated by another big raid in 1869. On 24 July 120 cattle and 30 horses were stolen from William Popham's farm, Meshlynn, near the source of the Little Mooi. The raiders escaped along a well-marked trail up a pass south of Giant's Castle, almost certainly the iNhlathimbe (formerly Hlatimba) Pass. It was decided to deal once and for all with the raiders, and plans were made to assemble the largest expedition ever to take the field against the Bushmen.

John Macfarlane, the magistrate at Estcourt, was informed, given overall command of operations, and told to liaise with Captain Allison. (Macfarlane was known to the blacks as *Ndabandhlevu*, which means "The Law with a Beard", because of his magnificent beard — magnificent even for those days! He subsequently owned the farm on which the township of Mooi River now stands.) As soon as he heard the news he wrote a jubilant note to Allison: "Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Good news for the Border Agent!" and immediately hurried up to Oliviershoek to confer with Allison.

It was arranged that two separate columns, totalling 11 whites and 200 blacks, should set out in pursuit of the raiders, one under Major Giles and one under Captain Allison. Major Giles' party, consisting of 100 blacks and four whites, went up the pass south of Giant's Castle taken by the raiders, after having been delayed by a tremendous snowstorm. Once on top of the Drakensberg they headed north to a point not far from Champagne Castle, and then turned south again. The second column, under Captain Allison, was to rendezvous with them on the summit. This column ascended the Namahadi Pass, at Mont-aux-Sources, and travelled south down one of the tributaries of the Orange River.

The two parties met on the eastern highlands of Lesotho on 22 September, well south of the Nhlwathimbe Pass. Soon after that they intercepted the Bushmen, and a sharp engagement ensued, in which 17 Bushmen were killed, including seven women and children. Sixty horses were recovered. According to one Basotho account, the spot was at the confluence of the Orange and Sinqunyana Rivers. This is the first occasion when an officially organised force from Natal succeeded in completely overpowering a band of Bushmen.

After the engagement the two columns continued still further south, and found their way back into Natal by a pass down the Drakensberg near the source of the emZimvubu River. This expedition deserves to be better known for its courage and daring. The men were away for two months, travelled most of the time through unknown and hostile country, covered nearly 1 000 km, and lost only one man, through sickness.

On their return Captain Allison sent in a full report to Shepstone, in which he paid high tribute to his black levies. "Scantily clothed," he says, "and exposed at times to severe cold and storms, without cover of any kind, except such temporary shelter as could only now and then be obtained, weary, and with their feet cut and bruised by the continual fording of rivers, marching by day and watching by night, these men have held on without a murmur through a march of more than 600 miles, through difficult and all but impassable country, giving an exhibition of courage, endurance, loyalty and obedience not to be surpassed by the best-disciplined troops."

We give now in full the story of another of these raids, for it includes the first fatal accident in the Drakensberg that we know of, and also gives a very vivid idea of the dangers and hardships experienced by these pioneer colonists of the infant colony, and of the hazards of travel in the Drakensberg in those days.

In March 1862 the Bushmen made a daring raid on the Dargle district. James Speirs, brother of Robert, lost 75 cattle and 15 horses, and Bob Speirs, his nephew, lost a horse that had cost £40. Charles also had been raided. The neighbours were summoned and they set off immediately, following a clear spoor round the shoulder of the Inhluzana and up the Umgeni River to its source. By evening they had reached the Insinga River, and here they camped for the night.

Next morning they set off again, and soon came across dead animals, stabbed instead of being abandoned to their rightful owners. Then, just past the Lotheni River, came the climax — the rest of the cattle lying in a ghastly heap of mutilated carcasses. Obviously, the Bushmen had found the pace too hot, and had decided to rid themselves of the encumbrance. Infuriated, the farmers returned home, but agreed to meet in 10 days' time at Lugaju's kraal, with a much larger force, and then to wipe out the marauding Bushmen.

On the appointed day 10 Carbineers assembled at the kraal together with 10 farmers and 14 blacks, all under the command of Captain Proudfoot. Proudfoot was another colourful character in the early days of the colony. He was an imposing man of great physical strength, and came to be known as "the Garibaldi of Natal". He settled at Rietvlei on his farm Craigieburn, named after his home in Scotland. He played a prominent part in the Volunteer movement in Natal, and commanded the Carbineers in the 1850s and 60s. He lived in great simplicity in his bachelor establishment, and died there in 1890. He was said to be the cousin of the Empress Eugenie.

This time the men climbed to the summit of the Drakensberg, almost certainly up the pass climbed by Giles in 1869, known as Proudfoot's Pass (iNhlathimbe Pass), a pass which features prominently in the closing chapters of this book. At first heavy mist held them up (they named the area at the pass Mount Misery) and then they rode on for eight days along the summit in a wide circle, coming out eventually at the source of the emZimkhulu River, 40 km south-west of where they had ascended the Berg. This was almost exactly the route taken by Lieutenant Melville's party 14 years previously, in 1848. They had just off-saddled when, on the slope of a hill, they spotted a young Bushman galloping away on a horse. Robert Speirs (Jnr) and Henry Dicks gave chase, the Bushman abandoned his horse, tripped and fell, and Speirs (Snr) was on him in a flash, pinioning him to the ground and capturing him. He was brought back to Natal under the charge of Captain Proudfoot, and kept at his farm Craigieburn, but three years later he died of tuberculosis. He was buried, and 26 years later, in 1888, Dr Sutherland, Surveyor General of Natal, came to hear of it. He obtained permission for the body to be exhumed, and sent it over to Edinburgh University. The story of how it was smuggled over to England in a lady's cabin-box, unknown to the good lady herself, is one of the more bizarre stories of these early times, and may be read in A.F. Hattersley's *Oliver the Spy*.

During this chase Thomas Hodgson[1], one of the farmers, had been accidentally, but seriously, wounded in the thigh by the man who was riding next to him. It was a gaping wound, and his thigh bone was shattered. It was decided that four of the party, Proudfoot, Speirs (Snr),

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[1] His name has been variously given, incorrectly, as Hudson and Hodson.

Willie Speirs and Fred Bucknall, should remain behind to care for the wounded Hodgson, while the rest returned home for help and medical aid. They set out, Robert Speirs going with them a short way to show them the head of the pass, down which they would descend the Drakensberg. Before returning to the others, Speirs decided to visit a cave where some Bushmen had been seen sheltering the previous day. He travelled some eight to 10 kilometres, and then, hot, weary and tired, he sat down in the shade of some rocks to rest. When he got up he was overtaken by violent cramp, and, with a heavy thunderstorm almost upon him, he just managed to reach the cave. Here, with the rain continuing, he decided to spend the night. Fortunately there was plenty of firewood, so he had a good fire.

Snow covers the twin summits of Hodgson's Peaks, named after Thomas Hodgson, who was accidentally shot while chasing a Bushman across the upper slopes on the left

John Hone

Meanwhile, back at the camp, Hodgson was obviously dying. The mist and rain came down, and the three men, surrounded by hostile Bushmen with poisoned arrows, in the loneliness and silence of the high peaks, and with a dying man on their hands, lost their nerve and panicked. As soon as Hodgson was dead (there was even a doubt as to whether he was dead!) they buried him under a pile of stones and, assuming that Speirs had gone ahead with the others, they fled down the mountain pass, taking Speirs' horse and all the food with them.

Next morning, in pouring rain, Speirs returned to the camp to find it deserted, and only a pile of stones to mark the spot. He prised off a few of the stones, and found, to his horror, Hodgson's body. Everything else was gone, including his own horse. The only thing he found was a tin, which he thought was a tin of gunpowder he had left there. He took this with him, and then set off to follow the spoor of his comrades.

He walked all day through pouring rain, and then all night to avoid freezing to death. During the night he came to the head of the pass, descended it, and in the morning found himself at the foot of the Berg. Here, with the sun shining, he rested awhile in its warmth. His matches were wet through, but, tearing off a piece of the lining of his coat sleeve, he set it alight with a shot from his gun, and managed to make a fire. He also managed to shoot three small birds, which he cooked and ate. It was Wednesday, and this was the first food he had had since Monday morning. He stayed there all day and the next night, keeping a good fire going as a signal, and firing an occasional shot.

The next morning he set out again, but in coming down the pass he had missed the trail and soon was lost. He reached the emZimkhulu without finding the spoor. Here he shot a small bird, and took the tin out of his pocket to light his powder-flask, but to his horror he found that instead of gunpowder it contained only salt. This left him with just enough powder for two and a half shots, and after that he would be unable to light a fire, and would have to eat whatever he killed raw. He was 80 km away from home (when telling the story later Speirs claimed, wrongly, to have been 100 miles — 160 km — from home!) in wild and mountainous country, weak from want of food, and exhausted from lack of sleep. But still he kept walking. He decided to strike north, in the hope of finding the tracks of their outward journey, and the carcasses of the slaughtered cattle. As long as his powder lasted he was able to light fires, both for cooking and as signals, but soon this was finished.

On one day heath blossoms were all he could find to eat. On another he killed a dassie which he ate raw, and then he lived on bulbs and insects. Grasshoppers he found not bad, but they were scarce and hard to catch. For four days he fed on ants from an ants' nest, crushing the nest in his handkerchief, but they stung his mouth and throat. One day he claimed to have even scratched his will on the walls of a small cave! He eventually found the hill on which the cattle had been slaughtered, but was too weak to climb it. At last, on the fourteenth day, he staggered into Dumisa's kraal at Impendhle, and a messenger was immediately sent on horseback to his farm with the news of his arrival.

In the meantime the Speirs family had not been idle. As soon as they learned that their father had been left behind, Bob and Charles set out with George Fox Fannin to find him. They were not unduly alarmed. They did not know that no food had been left behind for him, and thought that possibly he might be enjoying a little pleasant hunting on his own. It turned out later that they must have been very close to each other at one stage, on opposite sides of a small hill. The young men then returned home, and there the blacks reported having seen fires burning on the mountains for four days. Charles immediately set out again. On the way he met Dumisa's messenger, and hastened to the aid of his father[1].

Today Thomas Hodgson still lies buried close to the highest of the twin peaks that bear his name, where the only sounds are the rustling of the wind in the grass and the lonely cry of the wheeling vultures.

After 1870 the Bushman raids fell off sharply. None at all were reported in 1871, and in August 1872 the last recorded raid in Natal took place. In that month the Upper Pholela was raided, and 17 horses were taken. Counter-measures were swift: five Bushman men, two women and a girl were killed, and two women with babies captured.

And then, just too late, comes the first hint of sympathy for these little people. In reporting the raid, the *Natal Mercury* said:

> Could nothing be done to bring these unfortunate creatures — thorough outcasts of humanity, shot down as dogs whenever the opportunity offers — to live a quiet pastoral life? By educating a few of these people, in time they might become messengers of good to the last of the race of the once formidable and numerous Bushmen.

But it was too late. In 1871 the last remnants of the Lesotho Bushmen were destroyed by Jonathan and Joel Molapo, grandsons of Moshoeshoe. It is doubtful whether any remained in the Drakensberg after 1875, though as we shall show in Chapter 9, a small band was seen in the Mont-aux-Sources area in 1878. There are still a few stories among Natal farmers of individual Bushmen having been seen in the Little Berg in the early 1900s. In 1910 Maurice Evans speculated that there might be a few Bushmen left between the Malutis and the Drakensberg, and from time to time stories emerge of Bushmen still living in the Drakensberg region, but the probability is that they are the offspring of unions between Bushmen and local blacks.

If only they could have survived another 10 years the awakening conscience of mankind might have found a sanctuary for them, and the last remaining people of the Stone Age might have lived on into the twentieth century. In 1978 Professor P.V. Tobias gave the number of Bushmen remaining in the Republic as 25. For Botswana his estimate was between 24 652 and 29 600, and in Namibia 26 000[2]. The 1987-1988 South African Yearbook did not differentiate between black people in its population statistics for the Republic, but did so for Namibia, where it put the Bushman population at a little more than 31 500. There are some who believe that the Kalahari Bushmen are the descendents of Bushmen who fled here in the face of ever-encroaching hostile intruders, while others believe that they are the last remnants of a people who were once widely dispersed throughout Southern, Central and East Africa, but exterminated in all but the most inaccessible parts of the Kalahari.

In the Drakensberg, hemmed in on all sides, they put up a magnificent stand which, if it could have been recorded, would be one of the epics of history. It is impossible not to feel a deep sympathy and a great admiration for them, in their last days. They fought against tremendous odds, and a certain and terrible fate, in an effort to retain their children, their freedom, their hunting grounds, their rivers and their game. These things had belonged to their fathers, and to their fathers' fathers, since time immemorial. They would not lightly let them go.

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[1] [illegible] as it was told in later years by Robert Speirs himself, but I must admit to a certain amount of scepticism. That something happened I have no doubt, but to me it is [illegible] that a man who had farmed in the area for 11 years, and had hunted there, could have been lost in this way for two whole weeks. If it had been on the summit I might have believed it, but he got down without difficulty. From there he had only to follow any one of a hundred streams to come out eventually (two days at the most) into civilisation.

[2] [illegible] *The Bushmen: San Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa*. Edited by Phillip V. Tobias. Published by Human & Rousseau (1978). The figure for Namibia was confirmed by J.S. Malan in *Peoples of SWA-Namibia*, published by Haum (1980).

Surrender was not in their vocabulary. Stories are told of how the Bushman, shot through one arm, would instantly use his knee or foot to draw his bow. If his last arrow was gone, he would still go on fighting, until, finding death remorselessly upon him, he would hasten to cover his head, that no enemy might see the agony of death upon his countenance.

George William Stow tells the epic story of the last stand of one Bushman clan in the Sneeuberg. Pursued into the mountains by a commando of farmers, they were eventually cut off among rocks at the edge of a precipice. Here they turned at bay for the last time. One after another they fell to the guns of the farmers, until only one Bushman remained alive. He retreated to the farthest point of an overhanging rock, in a position where no member of the commando dared follow. From there, with his last arrow on the string, he shouted defiance at his tormentors. The commando leader called out offering to spare his life if he would surrender. "A chief knows how to die!" called out the Bushman. He released his last arrow, and leapt headlong over the precipice.

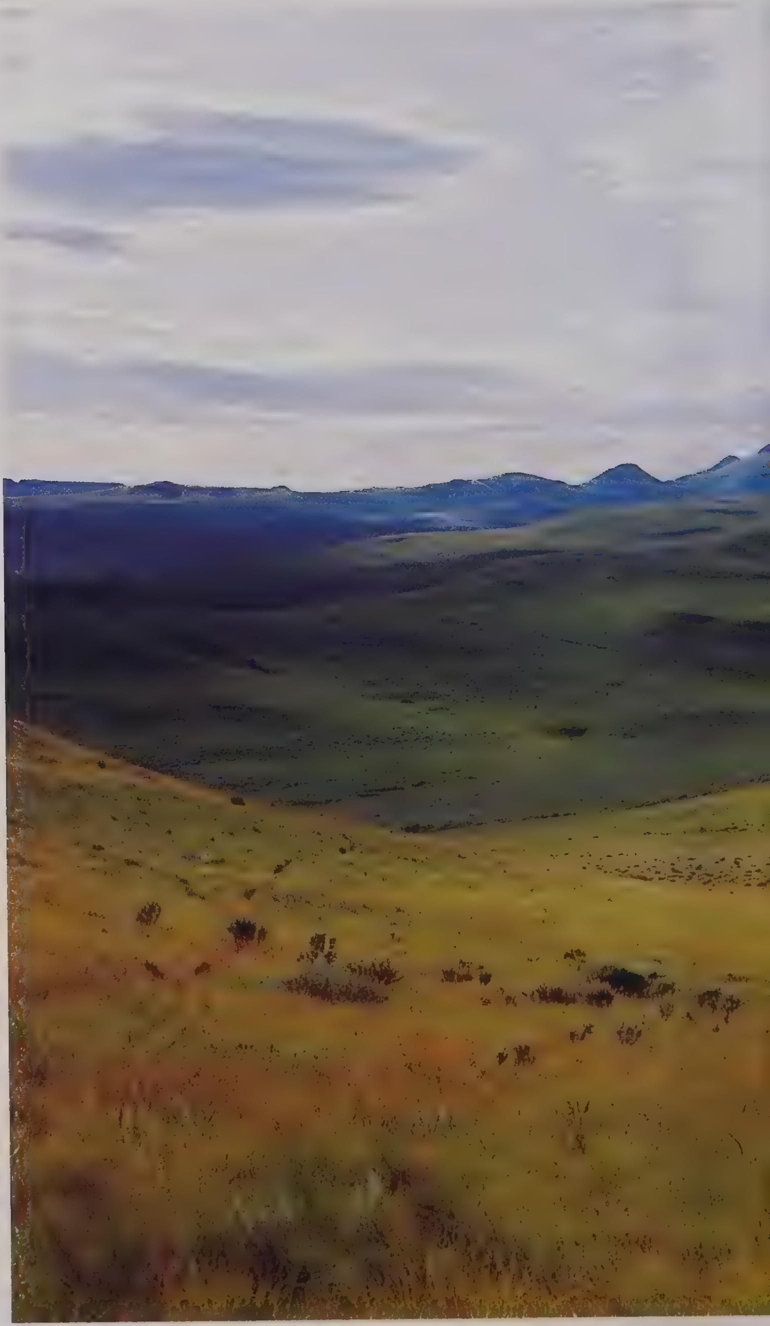
And Stow adds this final epitaph to a gallant race: "Had they been men of any other race except that of the despised and often falsely maligned Bushmen, the wrongs which were heaped upon them, the sufferings they endured, their daring and intrepidity, their unconquerable spirit, and the length of the hopeless struggle they maintained when every other race was arrayed against them, coveting their land and thirsting for their blood, would have placed them, notwithstanding the excesses into which they were betrayed, into the rank of heroes and patriots of no mean order."

And to this tribute we add one more, by Walter Battiss:

> There is no ugliness, but only beauty, in what remains of their frail existence. Nature was not destroyed, injured or warped by their proximity. As casual as the wind and water, they lived in undisturbed serenity while the ages came and went. Now they have all gone, but their art remains.

Yes, let us remember that even though they did raid the cattle of the white man, they held the line of the Berg during those critical years when white settlers and black tribespeople were invading Natal with their tree-felling, their ploughing, and their overgrazing. It is to the Bushmen that we owe today the unspoilt beauty of the Drakensberg. Without them we might have lost it forever.

Today the pioneers have gone: and so have the southern Bushmen. The Drakensberg today is a holiday resort, with many homely Berg hotels nestling in the valleys. Visitors enjoy every modern amenity, every kind of recreation, including hiking and mountaineering. But as they ramble over the grassy slopes few are aware of the drama that played itself out on these hills a little more than a century ago. Only the black man, who still inhabits these mountain valleys, remembers ... and tells and retells the story of that indomitable race of little men, and the drama of their passing.



Top of Mike's Pass

The wide and beautiful grasslands viewed from the top of Mike's Pass in the Cathedral area. Cathkin Peak is the flat-topped mountain in the background

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 4

EARLY TRAVELLERS IN THE DRAKENSBERG

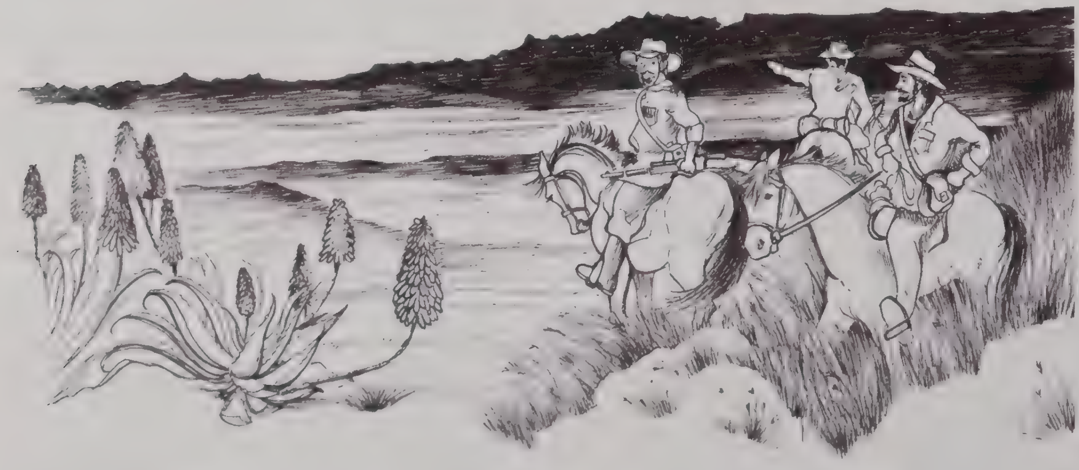
"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller
"Tell them I came, and no-one answered."
Walter de la Mare, "The Listeners"

It was a lonely, empty land into which those first travellers came. The peaks stood remote, far, enigmatic, unknown. Only the Bushmen and the wild game lived in those grim solitudes. The foothills, once the peaceful homes of the amaZizi, had been ravaged and depopulated by the ravening hordes of uShaka and Matiwane. Only the eagle, soaring a thousand metres up into the thin air, watched, and waited.

It is not surprising that the early colonists were slow in penetrating this mountain world. To a young community, struggling to subdue nature to its needs, mountains are little more than a barrier, a hindrance to travel and to trade. With all their love of beauty and of physical fitness, the Greeks never awoke to the splendour of their own mountains. They never climbed them for pleasure. It is only later, when increasing prosperity brings leisure, and the pressures of civilisation begin to stifle the spirit of man, that mountains come into their own. The golden age of the Alps had to await the climbing of the Matterhorn by Edward Whymper in 1865 before it got under way.

There were other reasons, too, for the Drakensberg's not being penetrated earlier, not the least being the fact that up to about 1875 the intruder was, as likely as not, liable to get a poisoned arrow in his back if he ventured too far into the shadows of the great peaks.

Then, of course, access to the Drakensberg was extremely difficult in those early days. The country was wild and broken,



In 1853 Captain Gardiner and party were the first settlers to see the Drakensberg, although shipwrecked Portuguese sailors, trekking to Delagoa Bay, reported seeing the range in 1593 and wagons or horseback were the only means of transport. From Durban up to the road passes of the Drakensberg ran the slender thread of the "main road", for many years merely a series of winding tracks through the long grass of the veld. Even this was 30 km to the east of the Drakensberg. It was not until the 1850s that a start was made on improving the track between Pietermaritzburg and Durban. Beyond, and for many years, only the wagon tracks remained. Hardening only came in the 1860s. The Government erected a chain of straw huts along it for the use of travellers, but there were no bridges. Major rivers were crossed at drifts, with small boats and ferrymen in attendance. Often wagons would have to be taken to pieces and reassembled on the other side. When the rivers came down in flood they could not be crossed for weeks at a time. In 1852 John Bird, Acting Surveyor-General, was asked by the Government to plan a road from Pietermaritzburg to Ladysmith, which had been founded three years previously.

As late as 1876 the journey from Pietermaritzburg to the Free State border still took six to seven days, even though all rivers had by then been bridged, except for the uThukela. If the traveller wished to branch out on either side of this winding ribbon, for some outlying farm, or for the mountains, he simply followed his nose, and depended on local farmers for hospitality.

Transport, of course, was all by Cape Wagon, a sturdy, strongly built vehicle that served as coach and home for the traveller, often for many months at a time. The secret of a well-made wagon was its looseness. It had to be made in such a way that its various parts would respond and give to the multitude of bumps and strains it would be subjected to. The length was from 3,5 to 5,5 m, and the breadth about 1,25 m. It was usually made of stinkwood, and a top quality wagon could cost anything up to £100. In addition, a team of 12 to 14 oxen would be required, costing about £8 a head, bringing the total cost to about £200, no mean sum in those days. The traveller John Shedden Dobie described wagon travelling as "the jolliest and most independent style of travelling ever I have tried, a prolonged picnic".

But it was a lonely, empty land.

Robert Ralfe (pronounced Rayf), farming at Bergvliet, just beyond the Military Post at Bushman's River Drift (in the Estcourt district: his descendents still farm there) went for 14 years without seeing a white woman!

William Allerston, who had been offered a position as a constable at the newly established village of Ladysmith, at £4 a month, arrived there at the end of 1849 with his wife and family to find only four houses of wattle and daub. There had been a fifth, but it had fallen down the day before he arrived. In order to obtain food supplies for the family he had periodically to walk 64 km to Bushman's River Drift, bringing the provisions home on his back.

When the Emmaus Mission Station was established in the Drakensberg in 1847, postal communications with Pietermaritzburg and Durban took place every six months.

In May 1850 Reverend James Green (later Dean Green) rode up from Pietermaritzburg to beyond Harrismith to meet Bishop Gray, who was coming to Natal overland from the Cape. From the time he left the present town of Estcourt to his return there, he did not see bread, vegetables, sugar, coffee or any meat but game.

When Charles Barter, a prominent figure in early Natal days, made a similar trip the same year, he missed Ladysmith altogether, and went on into the Free State without ever finding it!

If these were the conditions in the Midlands, north of Pietermaritzburg, what of the Drakensberg itself? A map of Natal, prepared in 1853 by C.J. Cato, gives a good idea of what was known of the area in the 1850s. North of Pietermaritzburg only three rivers are named, the Mooi, the Klip and the Buffalo (on the coast no less than 66 are named!), while Weenen is placed on the Klip River instead of the Bushman's. The Drakensberg is simply shown as a straight line, though there does appear to be a slight bend, unnamed, at what would be Giant's Castle. Not a single peak is named. Another map, published in Holden's *History of the Colony of Natal*, in 1855, is little better. The height of the Drakensberg is given as "four to five thousand feet (1220 to 1524 m) above sea level". The actual average height is 10 000 ft (3 048 m). Well could Dr W.H. Bleek, writing in that same year, 1855, say "The recesses of the Quathlamba are practically unexplored."

It was more than unknown. It was a place of superstitious dread. Many were quite convinced that it was the abode of mythical dragons. Even so reputable a paper as the *Bloemfontein Express* reported in its issue of 26 April 1877 that an old farmer and his son had come back terrified from a trip into the Drakensberg, claiming to have actually seen the dragon, a fearsome monster with two wings and a forked tail, several hundred feet long, and flying very high. One cannot help wondering how many wayside taverns the two had visited on their way home!

Actually no one quite knew what lay behind those enigmatic spires. There was a well-established rumour that the mythical unicorn was to be found there, a rumour referred to by Sir John Robinson in his book *A Life-time in South Africa*, published in 1900. Round about 1855 a Zulu man told A. Osborn, a Natal settler, that he and five other Zulus had once climbed to the summit behind Mont-aux-Sources. They had gone a little distance inland, when they found a remote and fairly extensive swamp, "of the extent of one day's travelling". There they found six large animals, about the size of a blesbok, dark brown in colour, and each with a long, straight horn on its forehead. The animals were extremely ferocious, and attacked immediately, killing five of the Zulus. The sixth only escaped by climbing a large rock. In February 1866, during the Basuto War, a strong column patrolled this plateau, and discovered the vlei, but there were no unicorns!

A Mosotho in the service of Daniel Bezuidenhout, then living near Bethlehem, offered to show his employer a kind of animal which, from his description, must have been exactly the same animal as the ones described to Osborn. The Mosotho added that it was so fierce that it would attack its own shadow!

The colonists of Natal were so convinced that there was something there that in 1860 they seriously considered organising an expedition to hunt out the mythical unicorn. It was proposed that a Natal Unicorn Company, Ltd, should be floated, but it never came to anything, largely owing to the hostile attitude of Moshoeshoe. The area was not approachable from the Natal side, owing to a lack of knowledge of the passes. The only way up to the plateau was through Witsieshoek and up the Namahadi Pass, and Moshoeshoe was more than ordinarily suspicious of the whole idea. In any case, as one of the members pointed out, what about the Bushmen lurking in the recesses of the Malutis, with their poisoned arrows! That seemed to put a final damper on the whole scheme, and the unicorns were left in peace!

Who were the first white men actually to see the Drakensberg? Strangely enough, we can almost certainly answer that question. On 21 January 1593 (in London people were beginning to talk about a new playwright by the name of William Shakespeare), the *Santo Alberto*, a large Portuguese vessel, richly loaded, set sail from Cochin for Portugal with 347 souls on board. Two months later, on 24 March 1593, she was wrecked between the Bashee River and Great Kei River. Sixty-two people were drowned, but the survivors, 125 Portuguese and 160 slaves, set out for Delagoa Bay (the present Maputo). Shipwrecks were frequent on this wild and inhospitable coast in those days. The usual procedure was for the survivors to trek overland, following the coast, and to head either for Delagoa Bay or the Cape. The great difficulty was always the broad river mouths to be crossed, and on this occasion the survivors, men and women, decided to strike further inland to avoid these crossings.

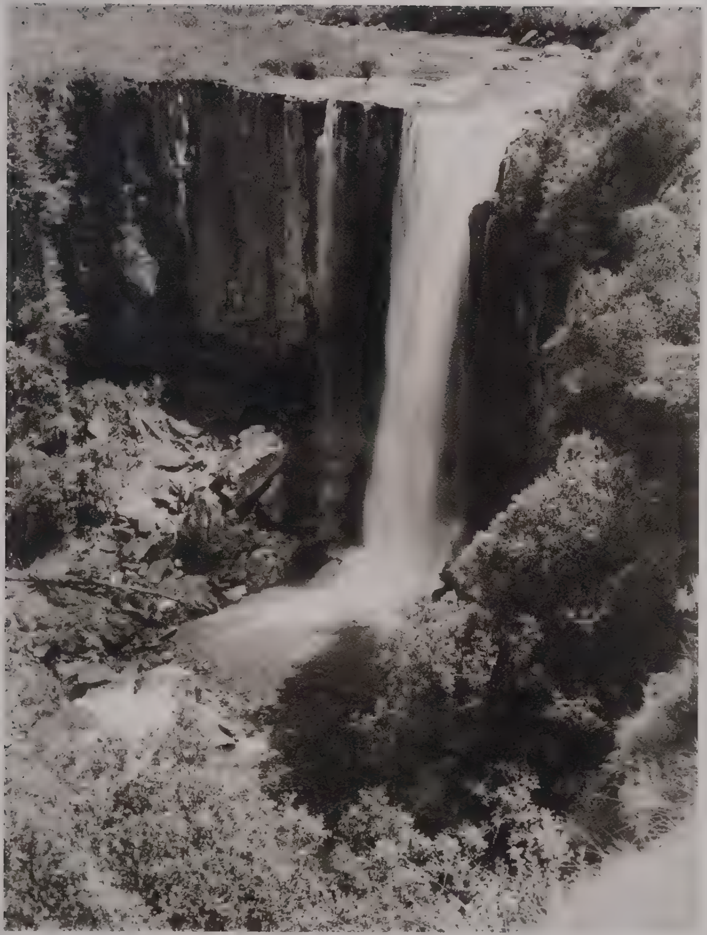
It must have been one of the epic journeys of history — over more than 1 000 km of wild, unmapped country. Many died by the way, but the survivors did eventually reach their destination, after a journey lasting three and a half months. They crossed the Upper emZimkhulu, the Upper emKhomazi, and the Upper uThukela. They must have passed through the Midlands of Natal and Zululand, more than 200 years before the Voortrekkers arrived there. On 2 May, when they must have been either near the Dargle or the Lotheni, they reported seeing, towering above them to the west, a great range of snow-covered mountains. This could have been no other than the Drakensberg.

How close to the Drakensberg did they come? Did they, perhaps, pause awhile in this pleasant land, and did some of the more adventurous souls go exploring, and did they perhaps penetrate the valleys of the Little Berg? Did they even climb one of the passes to the top? We do not know, and it does not greatly matter. It is sufficient that this mighty mountain chain had at last unveiled her beauty to the eyes of the white man.

Then, as the mists close in around the peaks on a summer's day, so the mists of time close in about this lonely land. For more than two centuries all is darkness. But sometimes the mists part, and reveal for a brief moment some elusive peak or soaring pinnacle, only to close in again and leave behind an unanswered question. And so, over the years, we catch an enigmatic, tantalising glance at some lonely traveller, who appears for a moment and then is swallowed up again in darkness, the story of whose coming and going will remain for ever untold.

In February 1829 Dr Alexander Cowie, a former surgeon from Albany in the Cape, and Benjamin Green, a merchant from Grahamstown, arrived at Port Natal. But they hardly even step on the stage. They came with the intention of exploring the Drakensberg and discovering the source of the Orange River, for even by that early date it had challenged the curiosity of men. But they changed their minds and decided to explore Zululand instead, in what turned out to be a fatal expedition.

Towards the end of 1836 two deserters from a British garrison in the



Malcolm Pearse

Sterkspruit Falls, Central Drakensberg

The Sterkspruit, in the Champagne Castle area, is fed by many small streams which gurgle and tumble down the mountainsides and which, after heavy rain, turn the waterfall into a raging and dangerous torrent

Cape arrived in Zululand after apparently walking for 23 days across the Drakensberg, but who they were and by what passes they descended the Drakensberg we simply do not know. In May of the following year two more deserters made the same journey across the trackless Drakensberg, and again there is the same enigmatic silence to all our questions.

Down the years came others. They pause a moment on the stage, and pass on into the wings. In 1845 W. Stanger was appointed Surveyor-General, and with four assistants was given the task of fixing the boundaries of Natal, and preparing a trigonometrical survey of the whole Colony. We have no record of where they went and what they did, but they must have made at least a tentative survey of the Drakensberg. The Stanger Map of 1850 (Land grants 1843 and 1848) was the result. Did they, perhaps, climb to the summit?

Dr William Stanger

Courtesy Killie Campbell Africana Library

In 1873 John Eustace Fannin, who by that time had joined the Civil Service, was sent by the Government to report on the passes of the Drakensberg. It must have been a dangerous and difficult task, for there were still Bushmen hiding in the innermost recesses of the Drakensberg in those days. What he did we do not know, but what adventures he must have had!

In 1874 Colonel A.W. Durnford and a detachment of the 75th Regiment spent six months in the Drakensberg, blowing up the mountain passes between Oliviershoek and Giant's Castle. They assembled at Estcourt, and from there proceeded first of all to David Gray's farm, Cathkin. They then crossed the Sterkspruit and pitched camp below the krantzes of the Little Berg. From this point they destroyed Gray's Pass. They then crossed over the Little Berg into the uMhlwazini valley, and camped at the foot of a hill "with a most extraordinary hole in its crest, through which the sky can be seen". Mountaineers who know the area will recognise it as Gatberg. They then destroyed the Organ Pipes Pass (known in those days as Old Bushman's Pass) and the uMlambonje Pass. Signs of their demolitions in the Organ Pipes Pass can still be seen.

After this they returned to their base at Cathkin Farm, refitted, and then turned north, camping at a German Mission Station, either Emmaus or Hoffenthal, probably the latter. From there they penetrated into the Mnweni area, and blew up Rockeries Pass, which they called Amaponjwana Pass. Here the cold was so intense that huge fires had to be lit to keep men warm, and shifts of 10 minutes were arranged.

Back at Gray's farm for a second refit, and this time they headed south, up the Injisuthi River, and so into the Giant's Castle area, where they established their camp near the foot of the Langalibalele Pass, just below the Main Caves, only a couple of kilometres from the present Hutted Camp. Here they experienced a tremendous snowstorm, and here also the regimental cook one day carved the figures "75" on a giant boulder, a relic of their stay which is still visible.

In 1869 the Rinderpest Patrol visited the Drakensberg areas. Scratched high on the walls of a cave, also in the Giant's Castle area, are their names: R.W. Wilson, who spent three years in the area, J.K. Popham, H.C. Boast and W.J. Stone.

These are merely glimpses into a fascinating past. Of much more importance are eight travellers who have left us a record of their travels, and whose story we know, often in a good deal of detail.

Piet Uys was one of the most dynamic of the young farmers of the Eastern Province who formed the core of the Great Trek of 1836. Popular, charming, physically active, a magnificent rider, he got on well with everyone, especially the British officers stationed in the area. When in 1834, it was decided to send an expedition to Natal to investigate the possibilities of land settlement there, Uys was the obvious leader. The expedition left on 8 September 1834, and Uys led his men north along the coast route, through the Transkei to Port Natal. Here they met the Governor, Sir Benjamin D'Urban (but failed to meet Dingane), and then, delighted with Natal, they left for home again early in 1835.

But this time they struck inland, and Uys led his men through the upper reaches of the emKhomazi, heading for the Underberg area. This was the last area in Natal to be opened up, and they found themselves in wild and unknown country, almost certainly the first whites to venture into these lonely regions. They crossed the emZimkhulu through a drift not far from its source and found themselves for the first time in the foothills of the Drakensberg. Did Uys, perhaps, even climb one of those beckoning peaks? It would have been well in keeping with his dynamic, enterprising character.

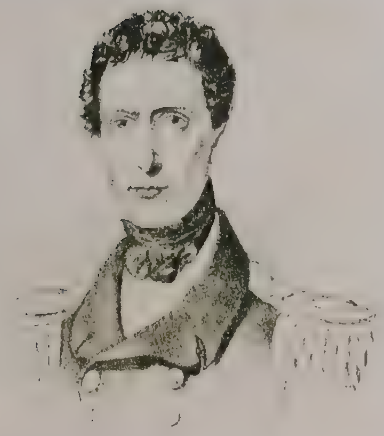
From the area of the present Underberg they travelled down along the length of the southern Drakensberg, across the Upper emZimvubu and so down to Port St Johns and home. For the first time the Drakensberg had been visited by a well-organised, duly recorded expedition.

Alas, three years later this great-hearted man lay dead on the field of battle. Beside him lay his young son, Dirkie, their story immortalised in the annals of the Great Trek.

It was also to the southern end of the Drakensberg that the next traveller came. On 29 December 1834 there arrived in Natal a young man of dynamic and restless character, Captain Allen Francis Gardiner R.N. (Gardiner Street in Durban was named after him). He had travelled overland from the Cape. Eight months previously his young wife had died, and, deeply affected by her death, Gardiner, now 41 years old, had decided to resign his commission in the Navy, and devote the rest of his life to missionary work. Gaunt, long-legged, and wearing an eyeglass, he was blessed with a wild impetuosity that would brook no opposition. His Zulu name was Kamungama, the Insatiable One, and for 17 years he lived a roving, adventurous life, burning himself out in the service of the God he worshipped. "How much he achieved is immaterial," says Graham Mackeurtan. That did not matter. His quest gave him as richly satisfying a life as any man could wish for.

Within a couple of days of his arrival he travelled up to Zululand, and made contact with Dingane, but the Zulus were in no mood for religion, and, with a heavy heart, Gardiner returned to Port Natal, where he established the first mission station in Natal on the Berea, which he so named because according to the Acts of the Apostles, the men of the Berea were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they readily received the word of God. Here he eventually played a notable part in the founding of Durban.

Soon after he arrived at the Royal Kraal Gardiner realised there was considerable friction between Dingane and the settlers, particularly the ivory traders. Dingane asked Gardiner to put a stop to this, and eventually Gardiner decided that his best course was to return to the Cape and ask the Cape Government to take over Natal. Eight months after his arrival he set out to return to the Cape along the coastal route through Pondoland, but at the emZimvubu he found his way blocked by the interminable intertribal wars triggered off by uShaka. He had to turn back, but on 24 September 1835 he set off again from Durban, with the idea of trying to cross the Drakensberg, which of course was still completely uncharted. With Dick King, Henry Ogle and two others he set off from Port Natal, travelling slightly west of true north. He crossed the uMlazi, and went via Umbumbulu and Stony Hill past the present Richmond. Fording the emKhomazi near the present Deepdale, he continued inland towards the upper reaches of the emZimkhulu, and then climbed up to the Underberg plateau near Highbury. From here he probed into the mountains in various directions, searching for a possible pass which, he hoped, would carry his loaded wagons into the hinterland, and so to the Cape. He investigated the present Sani Pass, at the head of the emKhomozana River, and found it unsuitable. Here he wrote in his diary: "A remarkable mountain has been visible in the Quathlamba Range nearly the whole morning, bearing north-west, and from its singularly indented outline I have been induced to name it the Giant's Cup." Twenty-seven years later the name was changed to Hodgson's Peak, for it was here that Thomas Hodgson died in 1862.



Captain Allen Francis Gardiner, R.N. The South African Library

Failing to find his pass here, Gardiner then turned south-west along the line of the Drakensberg. He travelled 25 km the first day, and on the second encountered another mighty peak. We turn to his diary: "I was ... quite startled at the appearance of a rugged mountain which I have named Giant's Castle ... Its resemblance to Edinburgh Castle ... was so striking that, for the moment, I could almost fancy myself transported

to Prince's Street." This was the present Garden Castle.

The name stood for many years. It was later transferred to the present Giant's Castle, 50 km to the north, as we shall show in Chapter 13.

Gardiner then continued southwards, still probing into the mountains, and finding the whole country deserted. Finally, on 23 October 1835, he abandoned the search, headed south-east for the coast, and came out finally at a point just north of Port St John's. Eventually, this gifted, energetic and impetuous man transferred his missionary activities to Chile, and died there on 6 September 1851, from exposure and starvation on a visit to Tierra del Fuego.

The year after Gardiner explored the southern end of the Drakensberg chain, it was the turn of the northern end to be explored. In the winter of 1836 two French missionaries stood spellbound on the summit of a peak which forms the centre-knot of three diverging lines — the main Drakensberg running south, the Malutis running north-west, and the continuation of the Drakensberg at a lower level, running north-east into the Transvaal.

Two or three months earlier, on 13 March 1836, Thomas Arbousset and François Daumas, two French missionaries at the Mission Station of Moriah in Lesotho, had set out on an exploratory tour of the north-eastern corner of Lesotho, towards the Blue Mountains, the Quathlamba, "mountains which, so far as is known", recorded Arbousset, "no European foot had yet trode".

It was, indeed, savage and unknown country. Before they left, they spent half an hour in prayer. "Many were the thoughts and feelings which crowded upon us," wrote Arbousset. "We knew not to what people, or into what regions, the Lord was sending us; we knew not what trials we might be called upon to endure; we knew not how, or when we should return, or what in the meanwhile might befall the station of Moriah, and the friends we were leaving there. Prayer calmed our anxious spirits, and alleviated the anguish of our hearts."

But they were tough, hardy pioneers. Perhaps there is a clue to the characters of the two men in the sermons they preached on the sixth day after they set out. "I preached," wrote Arbousset, with naive frankness, "on the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in the evening

Gudu Falls - this waterfall is a popular destination for ramblers in the Royal Natal National Park as it tumbles in front of a dark sandstone cavern

Malcolm Pears

M. Daumas spoke from the words of the Apostle John, 'God is love'."

Early in April they arrived at the edge of the escarpment, and gazed down in awe over the tremendous battlemented cliffs of what we call today the Amphitheatre. Three kilometres west was the mountain to which we have already referred, and which they named Mont-aux-Sources.

They were, admittedly, a little confused about the geography of the area. They gave the height fairly accurately as "not less than 10 000 English feet" (3 048 m) (actual height is 10 768 ft: 3 282 m), and the height above the summit plateau, which they say the Basotho called Pofung, the Place of the Eland, as 1400 ft (427 m). However, they gave the circumference of the base of Mont-aux-Sources as 20 miles (32 km) and described the summit as a plateau or tableland. Neither of these is correct. In giving the circumference as 20 miles they must have been thinking of the plateau from which Mont-aux-Sources rises.

They gave it this name because on its summit they found the sources of four great rivers, which they gave as the Orange, or Sinqu, flowing south; the Caledon, to the west; the Namagari, or Fal (Vaal?) flowing north; and the Letuele (uThukela) flowing to the east. We know that again they were not quite right.

The river-complex system in the Mont-aux-Sources area is extremely complicated. It is generally accepted today that three great river systems have their source on Mont-aux-Sources. They are: the Khubedu-Khubelu complex, i.e. the Orange River system; the uThukela head streams (three in number); and the Eland (Namahadi), running into the Wilge and thence into the Vaal.

Though incorrect in some of their surmises, let us salute these two lonely, intrepid travellers, the second party of white men to gaze at close quarters on the grandeur of the Amphitheatre. For they were not the first, as was generally supposed. In the same year as Arbousset and Daumas reached Mont-aux-Sources, Captain Allen Gardiner published an account of his own travels. He included in his book a rough map of Natal, and at the source of the Tugela is the word "Saddleback". It was by this name that the Amphitheatre was known for many years, so somebody had been there (though probably not to the summit), and named it, before Arbousset and Daumas.

About our next traveller, Major Grantham, we do not know much, but he is interesting in that he was instrumental in the naming of Cathkin Peak and Champagne Castle. Grantham was born in 1829, and as a young lieutenant in the Engineers he helped to lay out Aldershot Camp. He spent a brief while in the East Indies before coming to Natal to conduct a military survey in 1861. He then retired from the army and went to Australia, where he advised the authorities on railway planning. But his heart was in South Africa, and round about 1889 he returned to Natal (where he eventually died in 1896). He was a man of splendid physique, 1,83 m tall, and a tremendous walker.

In the course of inspecting the Drakensberg for his military survey in 1861, Grantham made David Gray's farm, Cathkin, his headquarters. It was during this visit that Champagne Castle and Cathkin Peak were named.

Champagne Castle is actually a rounded dome set a few hundred metres inland from the edge of the escarpment, but the precipitous cliffs of the escarpment on two sides of the mountain are usually considered part of Champagne Castle. Although it is one of the highest points in the range (3 377 m), it is easily climbed via Gray's Pass.

Cathkin Peak, which is close to Champagne Castle and often confused with it, is a very different proposition. It is a huge, square, free-standing block of a mountain, completely separate from the escarpment. While Champagne Castle is easily climbed, Cathkin, at 3 149 m, ranks as a difficult climb and was not conquered until 1912. When Grantham visited David Gray neither peak had been named.

There are three stories as to how the peaks were named. One, that has been current for some time, claims that Grantham and David Gray decided to climb the peak known today as Champagne Castle. In their haversack they carried a bottle of champagne, which they had optimistically brought with them to celebrate their climb. The going was tough, the day was hot and they took it in turns to carry the haversack. But when they reached the top and opened the haversack, the bottle was half empty! Neither man would admit to having taken a quiet pull from the bottle on the way up, so, to settle the argument, they decided to blame it on the mountain, and to call it Champagne Castle.

It is a delightful story, but the late Charles Gray, at one time a near neighbour of mine in the valley of the Sterkspruit, claimed that it was incorrect. Charles Gray was the grandson of the original David Gray, son of Andrew Gray, and he claimed to have the true story as given him by his father who was present as a boy when the events took place. According to Charles Gray, his grandfather David did not climb the peak with Grantham. Grantham climbed with his batman. During the climb, the young man slipped and fell, and in so doing broke the bottle of champagne which he was carrying in his haversack.

On his return to David Gray's farm, Cathkin, Major Grantham told Gray of the incident, and announced his intention of calling the peak Champagne Castle, because his servant had already christened the peak by breaking the bottle over it. David Gray showed his keen disappointment at this, saying "I hoped that you were going to call it after my farm, Cathkin." Major Grantham, sensing Gray's disappointment, but wanting to retain the name he had decided upon, compromised by saying, "Its name shall be 'Cathkin Peak or Champagne Castle'."

For many years, well into the 1900s, the term "Cathkin Peak or Champagne Castle" continued to be used on most published maps, though it is worth noticing that in the Stocker map (dealt with in the next chapter), published in 1888, the two names are clearly differentiated.

But there is still a third story. Henry Brooks, in his *Natal*, published in 1876, states that Champagne Castle owes its name to "a bet between two distinguished authorities in the Colony". This story is repeated in a guide book, *Glimpses in Natal*, issued in 1905 in connection with the visit to Natal of the British Association. However, my efforts to find out who the two "distinguished authorities" were, or what the bet was, have failed. Of the three stories, Charles Gray's seems more likely to be correct than the other two.

We come next to a most delightful character, John Shedden Dobie. Dobie came to Natal from Australia as a pioneer sheep farmer in August 1862. He soon became tired of sheep farming, however, and made three quite extensive journeys in Natal and the Eastern Cape, one of which brought him into the Drakensberg. He was obviously of a restless disposition, and in 1866, after only four years in Natal, he left for South America, where we lose all trace of him.

Dobie was a shrewd observer of his fellowman, taking in the human scene around him with tolerance, understanding, and a delightful sense of humour. He did not like Bishop Colenso. He had three dark kittens, whom he called Zulu, Satan and Colenso, "Colenso being the blackest of the lot". On two of his fellow colonists, Alexander Gibson and Wilson Wood, his comment was "Rum pair of pups! Wood going about in short pyjama drawers and helmet hat." Dobie had a vivid turn of phrase. Speaking of Giant's Castle he wrote: "The Giant fired the opening gun from his Castle at a quarter past 12, and after that there was an end of any hopes of seeing the Berg again. The thunder growled and the clouds gathered." He was a man of exceptionally strong physique, and a fine artist. His notebooks are illustrated with a series of most delightful sketches, some of which have been published in his journal.

In April 1863 he left Frederick Moor's farm, Greystone, just outside Estcourt, for David Gray's farm. At first there were faint tracks of a road, and then a series of wagon tracks, difficult to follow, and then he simply had to depend on his sense of direction. From an examination of his account, he must have ridden a fairly direct line, over the hilly country to the south of the present Estcourt-Loskop road, probably through the present Pasture Research Station. He crossed the Little uThukela (the Injisuthi) "at a good drift". The Berg was "shrouded in rain and thunder-rain". He stopped at a kraal to ask directions to Gray's place, but they did not know, and he had to ride on. (He discovered afterwards that he should have asked for "David's place"!) Eventually, towards dusk, he came out on the hills above and to the south of Driemeyer's farm[1] and saw below him the cluster of gum trees which denoted a farmstead (the present Nest Hotel). It was David Gray's "old place", and he had to go on to David Gray's new farm, Cathkin.

Next day, after spending a pleasant evening with David, he pushed on into the Drakensberg. He crossed the Sterkspruit, which he also called the "Little Impofana", and then entered what can have been nothing other than the beautiful valley of the Sterkspruit, where my home Emkhizweni is situated. He described it as "a basin at the foot of one of the spurs of the mountain, which is dotted over with sugar-bushes and clumps of bush, and waterfalls in the ravines".

Here he visited Robert Hope Moncrieff, who was farming at Kilfargie. Moncrieff was living in a primitive hut, and had settled there only two months previously, on the site of the present Bell Park Dam. (He was a brother of Colonel Moncrieff, of the British army, who invented the Moncrieff gun.) Here Dobie spent the night. It was cold, and each man had only one blanket. Dobie recorded later that during the night, when Moncrieff thought Dobie was asleep, the generous young man got up and covered Dobie with his own blanket.

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[1] Driemeyer's farm, Erskine, is 3 km from the Loskop-Cathedral/Winterton-Central Berg crossroads, on the left of the Central Berg road going towards the mountains.

The following morning, after their night in the hut, the two men rode up to "Griqua's Hoek", which Dobie described as "a stiff climb up the range". I have been unable to identify this place, but it may have been Hlathikhulu Nek. Dobie must have done some climbing here, for "immediately under the perpendicular cliffs of Champagne Peak" he saw the spoor of three lions.

They returned down the imPofana to Kilfargie, where Dobie left Moncrieff and continued down to David Gray's. Next day he struck almost due north, cross-country, arrived at Emmaus Mission Station, and from there proceeded on to Ladysmith.

As for Moncrieff, he was not to enjoy for much longer the peace and beauty of the lovely Sterkspruit valley. Towards the end of the year he started to build a proper house. Needing labour and materials, he rode off one day, just before Christmas, up the Sungabala Pass, a few kilometres east of the Royal Natal National Park. While resting near the summit, he was set upon by four amaNgwane tribesmen, Nagazana, a son of Chief Zikhali, Lugelezana, Matsheni and Magonondo, and savagely murdered. He was about to outspan, and had put his head under the flap of his saddle to loosen the girth, when the first man hurled an assegai, which penetrated Moncrieff's back. He tried to cross a small stream in order to place it between himself and his attackers, when he was struck by another assegai, and fell. The four men then set upon him with knobkerries and killed him, burying his body in a hole in the ground. The four were later arrested, and Magonondo turned Queen's evidence and was pardoned. The other three were condemned to be hanged in chains at the scene of the murder, and their bodies to remain there exposed to the weather, but the Governor would not confirm this, and they were hanged in the Estcourt jail.

There is, incidentally, an interesting semantic coincidence in connection with the name of Moncrieff's farm, Kilfargie. It was actually named after the Moncrieff ancestral home in Scotland, but there are still farmers in the district who insist that the name is really Koelvaatjie, so named because Moncrieff used to keep his milk and butter fresh by putting them into a hole in the icy Berg stream which ran past the farmhouse. It is quite a coincidence that the two names are pronounced in almost exactly the same way[1].

It is interesting to note that Dobie was the first traveller to come to the Drakensberg purely for pleasure, and not in the path of duty or necessity.

Most of these tentative probes into the Drakensberg had come from the east, the Natal side, and the main features of the Drakensberg were gradually becoming known. In 1887 came one from the west, the Lesotho side. On 15 October of that year Lieutenant Colonel Sir Marshall Clarke, K.C.M.G., High Commissioner for Basutoland, left Butha Buthe for an exploratory tour of the eastern highlands of Lesotho, or Basutoland as it was then called, and of the Drakensberg escarpment. It was a large party, consisting of 17 men and 30 horses. They planned to be away for three weeks. The country was entirely unknown, even to the Basotho, and their first difficulty was to obtain reliable guides. They headed first in the direction of Mont-aux-Sources, but, when about 24 km away, they turned south-east and travelled roughly parallel to the edge of the escarpment, in wild and lonely country, at an altitude of between 2 438 and 2 743 m. After passing the Motai, at an elevation of 3 185 m (Clarke may be a little out here), they struck Mopeli's bridle path, the main highway from Witsieshoek to South Basutoland, and made rapid progress, heading now due south. This brought them to the junction of the Orange (Senqu) and the Seate. Turning now north-east, they followed the Seate up towards the Drakensberg, and eventually came out on the edge of the escarpment. From Clarke's description it is a little difficult to make out just where he was. From an accompanying map, he would appear to have reached Champagne Castle and Cathkin Peak, but the description in his text applies more to the Mnweni area, and there are other indications which tend to confirm this. He gives no names at all, but mentions that they were at an altitude of 3 246 m, from which they could see the Platberg near Harrismith, the plains of the Orange Free State, the northern portions of Natal and Zululand, and the line of the Drakensberg stretching from Mont-aux-Sources to the Transvaal. In the immediate foreground was a "solitary bluff, grass-topped, but inaccessible", rising to the same altitude as the cliff. "The picture was made wilder," says Clarke, "by a rift, 50 or 60 feet across, running the entire depth of the cliff, and having no visible outlet at the bottom." He mentions a swamp, about a mile in diameter, which gives

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[1] This is not the only case where an English name has been erroneously Afrikanerised. Another farm in the Cathkin area, known as Heartsease, is spelt Hartsies in some maps.

Malcolm Pearse

In Memory of "Oompie" Liddle

The imposing dome of Mt Oompie, south of the Amphitheatre region, immortalises the memory of H.A. "Oompie" Liddle, an extraordinary climber from Kimberley for whom the joy of climbing was all that mattered rise to the Senqu or Orange, and also a waterfall down the escarpment, the sound of which could clearly be heard. This general description fits the Mnweni area much better than the Champagne area, although the waterfall is a little puzzling.

From there they turned back into Basutoland, passed the junction of the Semena and the Orange, visited the famed Sehonghong cave, crossed the Orange and then the Mantsunyane, went down the Lesobeng Pass to Roma, 30 km from Maseru, and site of the present University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Our next travellers are important for they were the first real mountaineers in South African climbing history, and they hold the record for the first climbs of any magnitude in the Republic. The earliest account of any serious climbing on Table Mountain, usually regarded as the birthplace of South African mountaineering, only dates from 1892, when S.B. Morgenrood and H. Bishop ascended Window Gorge, Silverstream Ravine and Kloof Corner. The Cape Mountain Club was only founded in 1891.

Towards the end of 1887 the Reverend A.H. Stocker came out to this country, apparently on a visit to his brother, F.R. Stocker, who was managing Ben Wilkes' farm, Wellington, near the present Draycott. (Wilkes himself farmed at Partington in the Loskop area and was instrumental in the naming of the town of Estcourt.) A mountaineer himself and a member of the select Alpine Club, Stocker thrilled at the contemplation of what the Drakensberg offered. He said of the majestic scenery that confronted him: "I hardly know what to say. Wordpainting cannot describe (it)." On 23 January 1888, he persuaded his brother to come with him on a climbing expedition into these beckoning mountains.

They made their way to David Gray's farm, and then to Gray's Cave "on the Sterk Spruit Berg" and camped there. This cave is really a series of caves, well known to mountaineers, just beyond the Sphinx on the bridle path to the summit of the Little Berg, in the Champagne-Cathkin area. Today they are called the Basuto Caves. The luck of the two men was out however. It rained for a week, and they did nothing.

But in April they were back, and this time they succeeded in climbing Champagne Castle, the height of which they gave as 11 355 ft (3 461 m; actual height 3 377 m). They camped in a lovely gorge, about 5 km from where their climb commenced. This could easily have been Sterkspruit Gorge. From there they made their way to the base of the mountain, almost certainly up the uMhlwazini valley. At the foot of the climb (the present Base Camp, where the Keith Bush Hut used to stand), they turned slightly left, instead of right, up Gray's Pass, today's usual route, taking what mountaineers call the High Route. This is a difficult climb, involving a good deal of fairly stiff rock work. Near the top the rocks were glazed with ice, and they found the going hard. The view from here, however, was magnificent, "the grandest I know anywhere," wrote A.H. Stocker, "a lovely valley with four magnificent peaks at the upper end, two square blocks and two aiguilles, lying to the north of Champagne Castle" (known today as Dragon's Back). By 2.30 pm they had reached the summit, which they described as a flattened dome, extremely dull and uninteresting. They descended via Ship's Prow Pass (which they called Champagne Castle Pass), "the stoniest and most abominable gully I ever was in", was Stocker's verdict — one with which modern mountaineers would agree — getting back to their camp after having been out 15 hours and 50 minutes. Before leaving the summit of Champagne Castle they noticed to the south, and a number of kilometres inland, a peak which seemed higher than the one on which they were standing, thus anticipating by 60 years the findings of surveyors in the 1950s[1].

In May, with F.L. Bridger, Reverend A.H. Stocker made a reconnaissance of Cathkin Peak (we have already pointed out that by now the names of the two peaks are clearly differentiated). Later that same month he was back in Gray's Cave with his brother. From there, accompanied by black porters, they transferred their camp to a "splendid little nook, sheltered by rocks and a tree", at about the 2 493 m level. (I suspect they were a little lower than this, as 2 493 m is well above the tree line.) Here they spent three nights.

On their first day (24 May 1888) they made their first attempt on Sterkhorn (Little Tetelelu, they give as the Zulu name). They climbed to the nek between Sterkhorn and Cathkin Peak[2], which they called

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See pages 87 *et seq*

See sketch on page 196.

Sterkhorn Pass. From there they descended a little on the western side, turned right, and contoured on a broad grassy ledge under the steep final rocks. They attempted to climb these final rocks, failed, and continued on in a northerly direction, until they reached the great gully between the north and middle peaks. (Sterkhorn has three summits, the South Summit, the highest and most difficult; the North Summit, slightly lower, and an easy climb; and Middle Summit, the lowest.) Again they tried to climb the South Peak, by the north-west buttress this time, and again failed. From here they had a look at the North Peak, and did not like the look of it, but found that by contouring round on to the east side, they easily reached the summit. They gave the height of the summit as 10 093 ft (3 076 m). Again they were out, by 338 feet, for the correct height is 9 755 ft (2 973 m).

Sterkhorn (left), the western face of which the Stocker brothers attempted to climb in 1888. Cathkin Peak and Monk's Cowl are to the right

John Hone

On the following day they made yet another attempt on the South Peak, on the east face this time, and again failed.

Two months later they headed for the Mnweni area, setting out on 12 June. On their way there they were particularly impressed by the Cathedral Range, which they called the Ibotwana Ridge. They first of all made their way up the left-hand tributary of the Ntonjelana. (There are two forks to the Ntonjelana River, the left-hand one to the west, called Ntonjelan' eshonalanga, the Ntonjelana of the Sunset; and the right-hand one, to the east, the Ntonjelan' ephumalanga, the Ntonjelana of the Sunrise.) Near its source they attempted to climb the North Face of North Saddle — they called the Saddle Segwana Cirque — failed, and next day made their way up the other branch of the Ntonjelana, climbed the Ntonjelana Pass to the summit, and then walked along the top, past the Saddle to the head of Rockeries Pass. uMponjwana itself is well described — a magnificent peak, cut off from the main escarpment by a huge chasm some 450 m deep. "The rock scenery round," wrote the padre, "is simply magnificent, and could draw expressive remarks from the most cold-blooded." Wisely, perhaps, he adds: "I forbear. The *Alpine Journal* is not the place for such enthusiastic outbursts!"

They returned the way they had come — one wonders why they did not descend Rockeries Pass — and three days later were home again.

South Gully

In July, back at David Gray's, Stocker and Douglas Parker did a bit of exploring in the Little Berg in the Cathkin area, discovering a new cave, which they called Eagle Cave. This is very likely the cave high up in a lateral valley above the right bank of the Spitzberg Stream (Wonder Valley). Successful climbing was out of the question, as the winter was severe and the peaks all iced up. From this cave, however, they did attempt to climb Cathkin Peak via the South Gully. They actually got to within 155 m of the summit, but here they had to turn back, defeated by the ice and the sheer face of the final rock wall.

From Eagle Cave they trekked across to Gray's Cave, determined on a final attempt on the South Peak of Sterkhorn. Stocker gives a clear and detailed description of the peak and of their climb — the two chimneys, one with a most difficult chock-stone, the east buttress, a very tricky traverse with little in the way of handholds, back on to the south-east ridge, an ice-axe step to a sloping ledge, under an overhanging rock, one final chimney, and at last they were at the top, at 1.40 pm. Not fancying the descent by the route they had climbed the peak, they decided to go down the west face. They built a small cairn, set fire to as much grass as they could, to announce their success to the watchers in the valley down below, and then roped down, not, incidentally, by abseil, but hand-over-hand.

On 11 October, still 1888, Stocker was back at Eagle Cave, with Andrew Gray, David's son, this time, to make a final attempt on Cathkin Peak. But the great prize eluded them. Unfortunately, their packhorse and servant never turned up, and they had to return to their respective homes. Cathkin remained unconquered.

These climbs are of tremendous interest. Not only were they the first serious recorded climbs in the Drakensberg: they were the first in South Africa. But more important, for our purpose, is the window they open on the state of our knowledge of the Drakensberg. From being a *terra incognita*, the Drakensberg in the late 1880s was now becoming better known. Stocker wrote familiarly of the Little Berg, of the sandstone rock layers, of the caves in the Little Berg, well stocked with wood and water, used by sportsmen and blacks. It was already realised that winter and not summer was the best climbing season, and June the best month. Although we have no records of them, a number of trips must have been made into the Drakensberg by this time. The route into the Mnweni was obviously known. Stocker knew that there was a South Gully to Cathkin Peak, and that this offered the best route to the summit. Someone must have been there before him, for one cannot see this gully from the farms in the valley. (The map which accompanied his article in the *Alpine Journal* will be found on page 86.)

Our last journey is an epic trek along the top of the escarpment, in the winter of 1908.

In that year the dreaded East Coast Fever was raging among the cattle of Natal. All movement of cattle from one territory to another had to be stopped. The Governments of Natal and Lesotho arranged for a joint police patrol to carry out a reconnaissance survey along the summit of the Drakensberg, to demarcate the correct line of the border, and to pinpoint the passes that would have to be fenced. The patrol consisted of Sub-Inspector Marsh of the Basutoland Mounted Police, Sergeant A.H. Openshaw and Trooper E.R. Blackburn of the Natal Police, four Basotho and two Zulu policemen. They covered the whole area from Giant's Castle to Mont-aux-Sources, and the complete trek took longer than a month. They were mounted on sturdy Basotho ponies, and food, blankets and tents were carried on pack ponies. Their rations consisted of army biscuits, bully beef, mealiemeal, coffee, and an occasional buck shot for the pot. Communication with the outside world was maintained by heliograph. Four successive communication points were arranged, the first on the lower slopes of iNtaba'mhlope Mountain, the second at Loskop, the third at Winterton, and the fourth at Bergville. Each morning, at a pre-arranged time, it was Trooper Blackburn's job to contact Trooper Hills of the Natal Police at the nearest of these four check points. Sergeant Openshaw was a bit of a scholar, and they had lots of fun with the heliograph. Towards the end of their journey, when Bergville was the check point, he asked Blackburn to call up the Magistrate and to send the message in Latin. Half an hour later the reply came — in Greek!

They set off from Giant's Castle, where, under a cairn of stones, they found a sealed bottle. Inside was a parchment with a message of greeting, in Latin (policemen were well-educated in those days!) from a reconnaissance patrol of the 7th Dragoon Guards to Sir Henry Bale, Chief Justice of Natal in 1901. What were those Dragoon Guards doing there, seven years prior to the Natal-Basutoland patrol?

At the Carbineer Memorial at the head of the Langalibalele Pass they found an old Waterbury watch, blackened with age and exposure, but it began to tick when wound up. The Langalibalele affair took place in 1873, so it must have lain there for 35 years.

The trip was made in the middle of winter, and in the early stages, especially, deep snow covered the whole of the summit plateau. By the time they reached the present Cathedral area they had had enough of the bitter cold, the biting winds and the exposure, and they struck down the Tlanyaku valley to a lower altitude. Here they found a strong stream, not iced over, and plenty of fuel, and relaxed for a few days in the warm valley. Then back to the heights where bitter Berg winds, howling over miles of snowfields, beset them. By now they were opposite what they called Cathedral Peak (this was probably the Mnweni, see page 178), and the bitter weather again drove them away from the escarpment. For a while they travelled along Mopeli's track, leading down to Witsieshoek. The track was snowed over, but marked with beacons.

At one point on this stretch they nearly came to grief. Openshaw and Marsh became separated from the main convoy. When at last they spotted it, it was away off on the horizon, heading rapidly northwards. It carried all the food and all the bedding, and the two men would never have survived a night out alone in the open without it. It was impossible to catch up with them, and shouting had no effect. Eventually they set fire to the grass, and that soon attracted the attention of the convoy. Finally, they reached the Namahadi Pass, and home, warmth and civilisation awaited them.

A trip of this nature would tax the strength of even the strongest man, and towards the end Openshaw suffered a heart attack, due, almost certainly, to prolonged exposure at a high altitude. He never fully recovered, and died a few months later.

It was, indeed, an epic journey, as anyone who has spent even a few days on the summit of the Drakensberg in the bitter weather of midwinter will testify. I know of one other summit journey to match it, indeed to surpass it. In May 1966 three men, H.G. (Godfrey) Symons, P.R. (Bill) Barnes and W.R. (Bill) Trauseld[1] — I knew them well, and had often climbed with them — walked from Mont-aux-Sources to Giant's Castle. The Openshaw-Blackburn patrol had pack-mules for their food and gear, but these men carried everything on their backs. Not only so, but they kept to the escarpment edge the whole way. The police patrol used, for some little distance, the inland Mopeli track, which is infinitely easier. Others have also done the journey in this way. The edge of the escarpment is not only deeply indented, doubling the distance covered, but it is a wild jumble of hills and valleys, and there are few more exhausting things than to travel along it, with a heavy pack, at an altitude of over 3 000 m. These three men did the whole trip on foot in 10 days, which included heavy snow, wind and rain. On 15 May Eddie Brokensha dropped them three tins of beer from his light Cessna plane, on to the summit of Champagne Castle. Otherwise they saw no one.

Basutoland Mounted Police patrol climbing the slopes of Champagne Castle during 1908 E.R. Blackburn

Since this chapter was written in 1970, summit trips have become a regular feature of Drakensberg mountaineering. In 1985 Lawrence Bates, a member of the Durban Ramblers' Club, devised and carried out what he called the Grand Traverse. Marathon runners had the Comrades, canoeists the Dusi — the ultimate test of endurance. Backpackers had nothing to test their mettle. Now we have the Grand Traverse, the ultimate hiking challenge, a back-breaking, tortuous trek of nearly 300 km, at 3 000 m, from Mont-aux-Sources to Bushman's Nek, carrying a 20-25 kg pack. In October 1985 Bates and nine other crack mountaineers set off from Mont-aux-Sources to pioneer the course, a gruelling two-week trip in every conceivable sort of weather. Only four finished[2].

And so the Travellers go on their way, appearing for a moment out of the mists of time to play their brief part against the magnificent backdrop of the mountains, and then to fade into oblivion. We salute them, for they played a vital part in the opening up of the Drakensberg.

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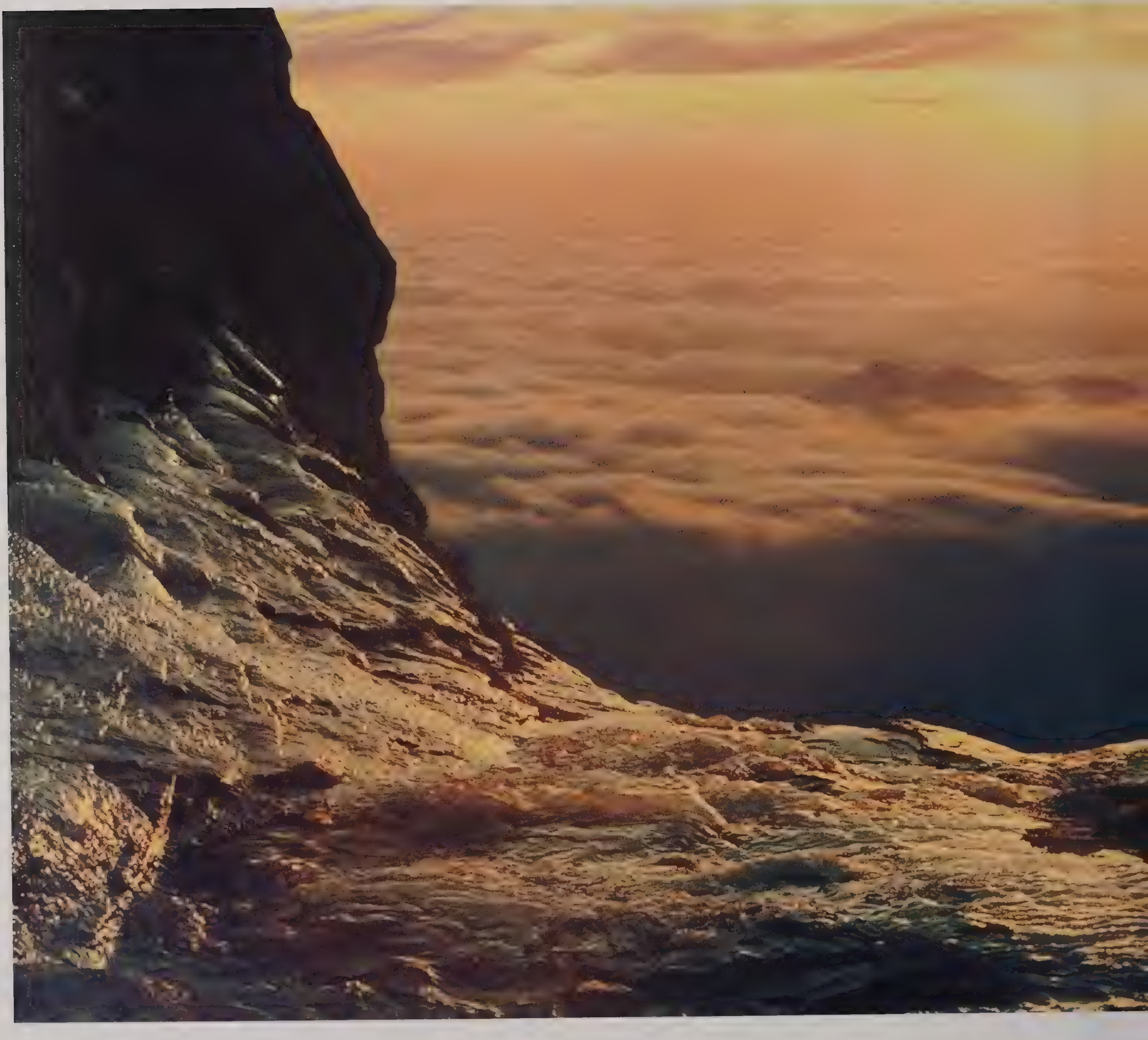
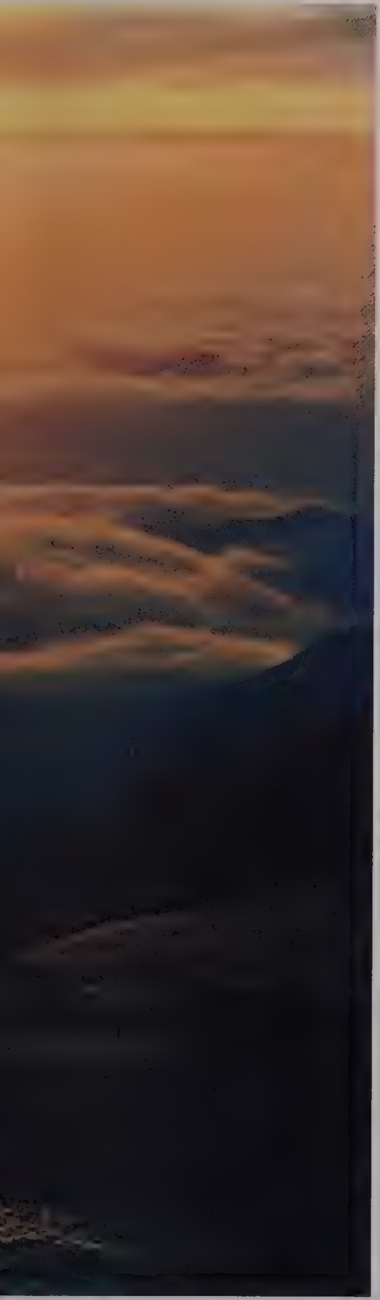
[1] Bill Trauseld died in 1987 and Bill Barnes and Godfrey Symons died in 2004.

[2] Jenny Owen, who has completed seven traverses, deserves credit for keeping the Grand Traverse alive. The event now has international recognition (in 2006 it was expected that 14 British Marines would take part), and it raises money for charity. In 2004 and 2005, R243 000 was donated to a children's cancer fund.





The Frozen lip of the uThukela Falls

Winter's freeze halts the spill of water while Nature paints the scene in breathtaking colours. The waterfall in summer disintegrates into a fine spray as it drops from the top of the Amphitheatre into the Gorge below

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 5

OF MAPS AND MAPPING

An exquisite piece of Geodesy may give
as real a pleasure, and be as genuine a
source of pride, as the masterpieces
of art and literature.
Arthur R. Hinks, Maps and Survey

In one of his essays, "Alpha of the Plough" remarks that maps are the magic carpet that whisks one away to sunny lands and serener days. I would say that they are "magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn". To browse over a good map of a country you have known and loved is to bring back after many years nostalgic memories, while to study a map of the unknown is to excite the imagination and call up visions as few other things can do.

But maps do more than this. A careful study of early maps reveals immediately how much is known of a particular stretch of country at a particular time, although it must always be remembered that the map-maker is usually at least 10 years in arrears of local knowledge.

There are no early maps of the Drakensberg. The first map of Natal showing the Drakensberg that I have been able to trace is the one included in Captain Allen Gardiner's *Narrative of a journey to the Zooloo Country*, dated 1836. It is a very rough map, compiled by Gardiner himself, and it formed the basis of all future maps of Natal up to the early 1850s. The Drakensberg is merely indicated by a straight line running roughly from north-east to south-west through a blank stretch of country, and no names at all are given, apart from "Saddleback", mentioned in the previous chapter.

In 1846 William Stanger, the Surveyor-General, complained that all available maps were full of mistakes. The coastline had been surveyed by the Admiralty, and was fairly correct. Inland topographical details were few and largely conjectural, and the Drakensberg, which was still a blank straight line, was invariably located 112 km too far to the east.

The first map of Natal to make an attempt to straighten things out was issued by Wyld in 1850. This map measures 40,6 cm x 55,9 cm and is to a scale of one inch to 8,33 miles.

About the same time, Stanger brought out the first official map of Natal to a scale of one inch to nine miles. Again, the details as far as the Drakensberg is concerned are meagre.

In 1861 Major Grantham, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was engaged by the War Office on a map of Natal for military purposes. This appeared in 1863, and was a large map in four sections, each section measuring 96,5 cm x 167,6 cm and the scale was one inch to 3,8 miles. Although Grantham spent some considerable time in the Drakensberg, his map is still woefully lacking in detail. The line of the Berg is more accurate, but the only place names given are Cathkin Peak or Champagne Castle, Giant's Castle, Bushman's River, Bushman's Pass (later known as Langalibalele Pass), Little Tugela and Tugela.

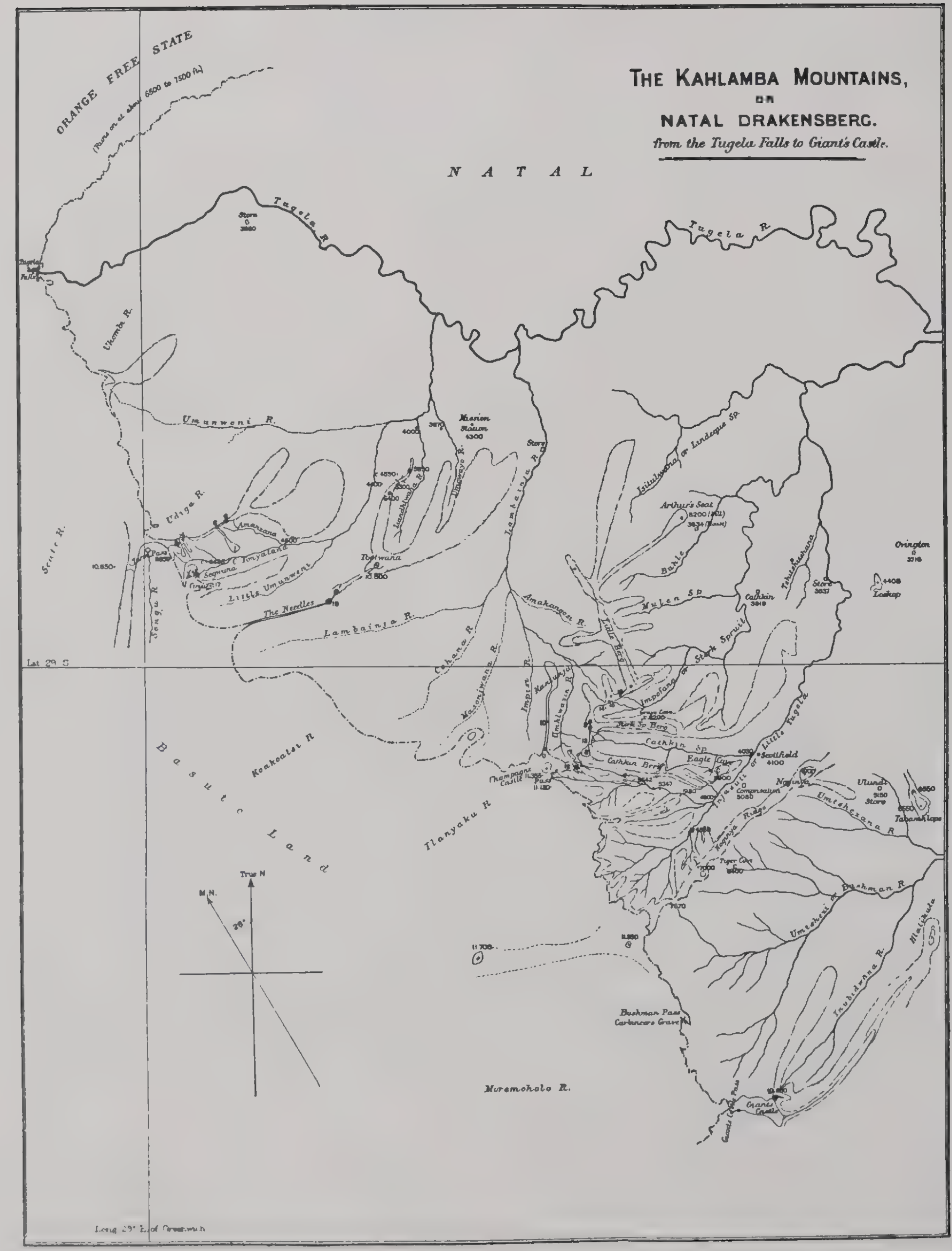
Another military map, compiled by the Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster General's Department in June 1879, is little better, its chief interest lying in the two remarks inserted in the country to the west of the Drakensberg. "Deep rocky valleys infested by Wild Bushmen", and "Very Wild and little-known Country inhabited by Bushmen".

The first map of the Drakensberg *per se* is the one which accompanied the article in the *Alpine Journal* of 1889, describing the Stocker climbs in the Drakensberg, to which we referred in the last chapter. This map is a landmark in the opening up of the Drakensberg, and throws a flood of light on our knowledge of this mountain region at that time. It covers

A cartographer's task was not an easy one in the 1800s. This aerial view shows the Mnweni Needles in the foreground, with the Cathedral spur in the middle distance (note the distinctive shape of The Bell), and Cathkin and Monk's Cowl in the far distance

Malcolm Pearse

the whole area from Mont-aux-Sources to Giant's Castle, and though far from perfect, is a complete change from all the maps we have had so far. The map is based on the map of Alexander Mair, Land Surveyor of Natal, issued in 1875, but where the extra information comes from we are not told. The Alexander Mair map has only eight names in the Drakensberg region: Tugela Waterfall, Tugela River, Losonjo River (uMlambonje River?), Cathkin Peak or Champagne Castle, Injasuti or Little Tugela River, Bushman's River Pass, Bushman's River, and Giant's Castle.


THE KAHLAMBA MOUNTAINS,
OR
NATAL DRAKENSBERG.
from the Tugela Falls to Giant's Castle.
NATAL
ORANGE FREE STATE
(Runs on at about 6500 to 7500 ft.)
Tugela R.
Store
3880
Tugela Falls
Ukomba R.
Umunweni R.
Mission Station
4300
4000
3870
Store
Umlambonja R.
Umcoveyo R.
Luandhlwana R.
4550
4400
5850
5300
5400
Udiga R.
Amanzana
Tonyalana
Segwana
Little Umunweni
10,650
Pass
8859
Sentu R.
Sengu R.
Tootwana
10,800
The Needles
18
Lambainja R.
Lat. 29° S.
Isitulwana or Lindeque Sp.
Arthur's Seat
8200 (Hill)
3634 (House)
Bahle
Mulen Sp.
Cathkin
3819
Tshushuzana
Store
3637
Orrington
3716
4408
Loskop
Amakangon R.
Little Berg
Stark Spruit
Impofana or
Cahana R.
Masonjwana R.
Impiri R.
Kanjanja
Umhlwazin R.
Kirk Sp Berg
Cathkin Sp
Cathkin Berg
Eagle Cave
4030
Scottsfield
4100
Champagne Castle 11,355
Pass
11,120
5347
Compensation
5080
Nqunya
Ulundi
5150
Store
6650
5550
Tabamhlope
Umtshezana R.
Injasuti or Little Tugela
Nqunya Ridge
Tiger Cave
7000
7070
Umtshezi or Bushman R.
Hlatikulu
Inubidwana R.
11,708
11,250
Bushman Pass
Carbineers Grave
Giant's Castle
Giant's Castle Pass
Moremoholo R.
Ilanyaku R.
Koakoatsi R.
Basuto Land
True N
M.N.
26°
Long. 29° E. of Greenwich

The Stocker map of 1888

The Stocker map (opposite) has no less than 47 names. Two or three of these are a little difficult to identify today, but most are recognisable. As this map is such an important landmark, we give all these names, together with their modern equivalents in brackets.

Tugela Falls (uThukela Falls)
Woodhouse Kop (Sentinel?)
South Tugela Gate (Eastern Buttress?) Mont-aux-Sources
Tugela River (uThukela River)
Umkombi River (ubuSingatha?)
Umunweni River (Mnweni River)
Udiga River (uMbundini River?)
Tarn Pass (Rockeries Pass)
Imponjwane (uMponjwana or Rockeries Tower)
Umunweni Castle (Rockeries)
Two peaks of Umponqwasi (two Mnweni Needles)
Amanzana River
Tonyalana River (Ntonjelan' eshonalanga)
Little Umunweni (Ntonjelan' ephumalanga)
Segwana Cirque (Saddle)
Ibotwana (Cathedral Peak[1])
Two peaks (Outer and Inner Horns)
The Needles (Chessmen)
Lambainja River (uMlambonje)
Cohana River (Didima River?)
Masonjwana River (Masongwana)
Impisi River (Nkosazana)
Kantunja (Gatberg, iNtunja)
Umhlwazin River (uMhlwazini)
Kantunja Arête (Dragon's Back)
Champagne Castle Pass (Ship's Prow Pass)
Cathkin Peak
Inkosana (Monk's Cowl)
Sterk Horn
Umhlwazin Eland Pass (Hlathikhulu Nek)
Isiwa Nimpumalanga or East Kranz (Eastern precipices of Champagne Castle)
Impofana or Sterk Spruit
Gray's Cave (Basuto Caves)
Eagle Cave (cave in right-hand lateral stream in Wonder Valley?)
Injasuti or Little Tugela (Injisuthi or Little uThukela)
Scottfield
Compensation
Cathkin Spruit (Spitzberg Stream – Wonder Valley)
Noginya Ridge (Negenya: Cloudland's Col)
Tiger Cave
Umtshexi or Bushman's River (Mtshezi)
Bushman's Pass
Inubidwana River (Ncibidwane)
Giant's Castle
Giant's Castle Pass

Indeed, it shows a notable increase in contemporary knowledge of the Drakensberg.

Not the least interesting feature of this map are the two peaks on a high ridge, stretching westwards into Lesotho, about 15 km south of Champagne Castle. They are marked 11 350 and 11 700, obviously their heights in feet. These two unnamed peaks are the Injisuthi and Makheke. This latter peak, it will be noticed, is 345 feet (105 m) higher than Champagne Castle, according to the figures given in the Stocker map. And yet right up to the early 1930s this fact was completely missed by subsequent cartographers, who usually gave Champagne Castle as the highest point in the Drakensberg area.

That the Stockers knew of this still higher point 100 years ago, and gave its height with considerable accuracy, long before the days of systematic surveying, is quite remarkable. Makheke is higher than Champagne Castle, by 84 m (276 feet).

What, then, is the highest point in the Drakensberg, and is the highest point in the Drakensberg the same as the highest point in Southern Africa?

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[1] He may, however, be giving the Zulu name for the Chessmen, which he calls the Needles, or of the whole Cathedral range. Ibotwana in Zulu means "children". (The preponderance of Zulu names will be noted.)

The story of the search for this highest point is an interesting one. For many years Mont-aux-Sources was accorded the honour. Although mountaineers from the earliest days doubted this, and the error was perpetuated in some geography books down the years. In 1922 Bassett-Smith and Cameron, two mountaineers who were among the first to climb in the Drakensberg after the Stockers, claimed that the highest point in the range was "a point on a ridge a few miles north of Champagne Castle". They were almost certainly referring to Cleft Peak, in the Cathedral area.

But as time went on rumours of a high ridge west of Injisuthi kept cropping up. This ridge forms a watershed of the Bafali and the Sanqebethu Rivers, and culminates in several particularly high peaks. In 1938 Colonel Park Gray, grandson of David Gray, and J. van Heyningen, the forester at Cathkin Peak, climbed to the top of Champagne Castle with a builder's spirit level, and with this primitive instrument established the fact that at least one peak on this ridge, subsequently known as Makheke, was almost certainly higher than the peak they were standing on. They proceeded on to this peak, climbed it, and built a cairn of stones on the summit, in which they left a bottle with their names and the date. They named the peak "Gray's Peak". A couple of kilometres to the north-east and north-west were two other peaks, only slightly lower than the one they were standing on. This is usually quoted as the first ascent of Gray's Peak, but it must have been climbed before 1888, for the Stockers gave its height as 11 700 ft (3 567 m), and heights in those days were almost invariably computed from aneroid barometer readings, taken on the spot.

Des Watkins on the summit of Makheke

In April 1945 Des Watkins and Charles Gloster visited the area, taking three days to reach the three peaks, Makheke, Ubutswane and Mafadi. The highest, Makheke (Gray's Peak), was easily distinguished as it was capped with two layers of basalt. The other two had only one basalt rock band. They climbed Makheke, and estimated its height by aneroid barometer as 3 488 m, only 27 m higher than its subsequent official height. On their return they had a bad time. Rain set in and heavy mist blanketed the valleys. They set their course by compass for Champagne Castle, but compass readings in this rocky area are notoriously faulty, and they came out at Didima Dome, 30 degrees off course, two days overdue, and suffering from lack of food and exposure.

Des Watkins' survey party on the summit of Makheke, December 1950. From left, back: Lorna Pierson, Gillian Bettle, Jean Watkins. Front: Des Watkins, Barry Anderson

Des Watkins

A year later Des Watkins was back again, this time with an Abney Level. Assuming Champagne Castle to be 3 429 m, he made Makheke just over 3 520 m, slightly higher this time than his previous reading. Actually, Champagne Castle is only 3 377 m, and compensating for this error, Watkins' reading should have been 3 468 m for Makheke, only 7 m out from its correct height, a remarkably accurate figure considering the instrument he was using. He also fixed the heights of Mafadi as 3 to 4,5 m lower than Makheke, and Ubutswane very slightly lower than Mafadi.

About the same time, on 20 and 21 July 1946, with the controversy at its height, I set out with Ian Clarke of Cathkin Park Hotel, John Harwin of the University of Natal, and David Paton, son of Dr Alan Paton. We lugged a dumpy-level to the top of Champagne Castle, and established definitely that there were at least two peaks on the ridge running westwards from Injisuthi, higher than the point we were standing on. Of course we could not compute their exact heights, nor could we compensate for the curvature of the earth, but we estimated that they were between 45 m to 55 m higher.

Over Christmas of 1948 Des Watkins was back at Makheke in another attempt to try and determine its exact height. He, Charles Gloster and Barry Anderson, a surveyor, had planned a long summit trek from Sehlabathebe, near Bushman's Nek, to Champagne Castle, and as Makheke lay close to their route and they had a surveyor with them, they decided to make a more accurate attempt at fixing the exact height of Makheke. Unfortunately, owing to the weight of their packs, they were unable to take a theodolite with them, but they were able to find room for an Aneroid, an Abney Level and a Prismatic Compass. The only map available at the time was the Drakensberg Sheet of the 1:250 000 Series of the Union, but with the aid of this map and using the prismatic compass, they were able to make a rough resection, and vertical angles were measured with the Abney Level. The results showed that Makheke was definitely higher than Champagne Castle by some hundreds of metres, but the figure they reached was still not accurate enough. They were able, however, with the help of a lonely Basotho herdboy encountered by luck at the foot of the peak, to determine the correct name of the peak, until then known as Gray's Peak, as Makheke.

Two years later, in December 1950, Watkins, Gloster and Anderson were back again, this time with a theodolite. They were accompanied by 10 other mountaineers. This time trig levels were carried through into Lesotho by resection at the escarpment edge from trig beacons down in Natal, and then by triangulation to Makheke. The height of Makheke was fixed at 3 461 m, which was dead on the mark. A number of other high points were included in their calculations, and these were carried back to Natal for final analysis. To their amazement they found another peak about 30 km south of Makheke which was registering about 21 m (70 ft) higher than Makheke.

This, of course, had to be checked, and during Easter of 1951 a large party, including Anderson, Watkins and Roy Goodwin, a student surveyor, visited the peak, which proved to be near the headwaters of the emKhomazi River. They reached the new peak via the Mohlezi Pass, and climbed it on Sunday, 25 March. This time they had with them a Wild T2 theodolite, and with the assistance of this instrument they were able to fix the exact position of the new peak. The height was worked out at 3 483 m (11 425 ft), exactly 21 m (70 ft) higher than Makheke.

It only remains to add that on 25 February 1954, this peak was finally established as the highest point in Africa south of

Surveying from the summit of Thabana Ntlenyana, March 1951. Barry Anderson at the theodolite, Roy Godwin taking field notes Des Watkins

Hugh Peake and Alwyn Bisschoff establish, officially, the height of Thabana Ntlenyana, 25 February 1954 Alwyn Bisschoff

Thabana Ntlenyana, "The Beautiful Little Mountain" is the highest point in southern Africa

Alwyn Bisschoff

Kilimanjaro. On that day Hugh Peake, Colonial Surveyor, and Alwyn Bisschoff, Agricultural Officer for Mokhotlong District, climbed to the top of the mountain with the necessary survey instruments. They checked and cross-checked both the name of the mountain with local chiefs, and their figures. The name, they found, was not quite the same as that given to Des Watkins and Barry Anderson in 1951, "Thabantshonyana" (The Little Black Mountain). They established it as "Thabana Ntlenyana" (The Beautiful Little Mountain), and so it stands today[1]. They gave the height as 3 482 m, and Makheke as 3 461 m, confirming exactly the figures obtained by Des Watkins and Barry Anderson in 1951. The mountain lies 22 km south-west of Giant's Castle, and 27 km from Makheke. (Lat. 29 degrees 28 minutes 07 seconds south. Long. 29 deg 16 min 08 sec east.)

But this does not quite settle the question as to which is the highest peak in the Drakensberg, for neither Thabana Ntlenyana nor Makheke are on the watershed. They lie several kilometres inland. The six highest points in the Drakensberg, according to the latest survey figures, are as follows:

Injisuthi — 3 410 m
Champagne Castle — 3 246 m
Popple Peak — 3 331 m
Giant's Castle — 3 314 m
Mont-aux-Sources — 3 282 m
Cleft Peak — 3 277 m

Four of these peaks, Injisuthi, Champagne Castle, Popple Peak and Mont-aux-Sources, are set slightly inland, but as they are all on the watershed they have been included.

After the Stocker map of 1888, 40 years elapsed before the first really accurate and authentic map of the Drakensberg became available. In 1927 G.M.J. Sweeney produced a map of the Drakensberg which, for many years, maintained its reputation and popularity as the most accurate and authoritative map of the Drakensberg. It was a remarkable piece of work, and was undertaken to meet the needs of the infant Natal Mountaineering Club. Sweeney based his map on the farm surveys in the Surveyor-General's office, which were incorporated in a large wall map known as Holmden's Map of Natal. The scale was half an inch to the mile.

Sweeney's completed map was to the same scale, measured 52 cm x 73,5 cm, and covered the whole area from Mont-aux-Sources to Giant's Castle. It proved an immediate success, passed through many editions, and was the "Bible" of Natal mountaineers for many years. It was superseded during the 1980s when the Directorate of Forestry created a range of outstanding maps by cartographer Peter Slingsby. For 20 years these were the maps of choice, but more recently a new series of maps has been produced by the parks board in conjunction with a private mapping company using modern computer technology.

In 1945 J.E.L. Peck and I mapped the Cathkin area by plane table, and with subsequent information extracted from aerial photographs, produced a map 51 cm x 65,5 cm, to the scale of two inches to the mile. This map was published by *The Cape Times* in five colours.

A year later, Albert van der Riet, of the Cathedral Peak Hotel, asked me to produce a similar map of the Cathedral area, and I spent my holidays

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[1] The name was checked by the Lesotho Government. They asked Chief Matlere to nominate three old men. They all confirmed the name as Thabana Ntlenyana, "the Beautiful Little Mountain", not Thabashonyana, "The Little Black Mountain", the name that had been given to Watkins in 1951.

Malcolm Pearse

Lightning over Cathedral Peak

'It seemed like a thing alive, streaming like molten iron.'

during the next couple of years on the job, finding it extraordinarily interesting and exhilarating. Added to the delight of familiarising myself with one of the most beautiful areas in the whole Drakensberg was the constant challenge of the mathematical problems that kept arising (and I am no mathematician!). This map was also eventually published in five colours by *The Cape Times*, its east-west axis matching with the Cathkin Map.

These two maps formed the basis of two large relief model maps which I built for Cathkin Park Hotel and Cathedral Peak Hotel[1], to the scale of six inches to the mile. In 1963 I built a similar relief model map of the Giant's Castle area for the Natal Parks Board.

To give an idea of what the work involved, it may not be out of place if I close this chapter with a few pages from my logbook of 1947. (In following this the maps on pages 367 and 368 will be found helpful).

> *Friday, October 3, 1947.* Left Estcourt about 4 pm with the intention of mapping the line of the escarpment north and south of Umlambonja Buttress, and the main peaks of the Cathedral Range. Arrived at Cathedral Peak Hotel 6 pm. Sat up until nearly twelve o'clock with George Thomson. He has a fine set of photographs of all his famous climbs. He told me the story of his attempts, with Peter Pope-Ellis and young Henning, to recover the body of Tom Pinkney, the young Johannesburg man who had fallen to his death down the Amphitheatre Wall a few days previously. It must have been a most gruelling climb — the worst, he said, in his experience, and if George says it was bad, it must have been! Bad weather had been the cause of their failure.
>
> *Saturday, October 4, 1947.* Left hotel 7.20 am and made my way up the Umlambonja with a very heavy pack — a gruelling slog, boulder-hopping for about four hours. The view, as I climbed higher and the Chessmen and the Buttress closed in, was magnificent. Arrived at Twins Cave about 3 pm. Found it without difficulty on north side of the Twins, very roomy and snug. Altitude must have been close on 9 000 feet. Unfortunately on the way up I had slipped and fallen, and I found I had broken eight of the dozen eggs I was carrying in a billy-can. After extracting eggshells, made egg-flip out of the sticky mess which remained at the bottom of the can. Then sat outside on a ledge, very tired, smoked my pipe and admired the view, one of the finest I have seen. Full in front, South Saddle Peak, Outer Mnweni Needle, Devil's Tooth and Eastern Buttress. Ground dropped sharply from cave mouth to valley of the Ntonjelana, and from there simply a mass of jumbled hills, valleys and minor peaks stretching across to the Free State. Watched the shadows lengthen — blue and purple in the gorges, fading to softer hues in the distance, the whole capped with a quietly-tinted sunset. Then went in to cook supper and prepare for the night. Found fair amount of timber about, but not enough to indulge in the luxury of a camp fire. Water the main difficulty. There is a slight drip in the cave, enough to fill a billy-can overnight, and that was all. Slept well.
>
> *Sunday, October 5, 1947.* Up at dawn, breakfast, and started climbing by 6 am. Fairly stiff but short climb brought me to the summit of the escarpment. Established the first flag-beacon by 7 am. Thereafter established a further five along the escarpment, including the final control-beacon, the latter at the summit of an unnamed peak. Very tired by 11 am, so had lunch at the top of this peak, boiling some Oxo. Returned along beacon route, and took shots from each one, thus mapping in some three to four miles of escarpment.
>
> Back at cave soon after 3 pm to find baboons had been busy in my absence. The camp looked as if it had been well-nigh wrecked — paper and cardboard packages ripped to pieces and strewn all over the place. Every package had been torn open, three packets of biscuits and four remaining eggs wolfed. The only things that had escaped were the tinned stuff and a few other items tied up in bags. Raisins strewn all over the floor. I shall be short of food before the end of the trip. Pipe outside and watched sunset. Read till fairly late. During the night the wind changed and moaned eerily about the rock pinnacles. It looked as if mist was banking up.
>
> *Monday, October 6, 1947.* Woke once during the night, at 1.30 am,

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[1] This historic relief map has been restored and is in the modern Cathedral Peak Hotel foyer.

to find a heavy mist. Morning dawned clear, but mist filled all the valleys below. Unforgettable sight — high above the clouds, sun rising above them, isolated peaks rising sharply black through white wool.

After breakfast attempted to climb the Twins. Actually there are three peaks, the south-west one, the highest; the north-east; and a central one. The north-east one was easy. I attempted the south-west one first of all from the west face. This attempt failed completely. I then tackled the north face, and got within 20 feet of the summit, but was forced back: it was too risky without a second man. Then tried the east face, and an easy but exhilarating climb brought me to the summit at about 8.30 am. Back to camp, and read until lunch time.

After lunch took the plane-table and tripod to the summit of N.E. Twin for a few readings. The summit was only a few feet square, and already contained the usual cairn of stones. There was just room for myself and tripod. I have never before worked on such a lonely spot, and with such a sense of isolation and exposure. On the one side, a sheer 2 000 feet drop, was the Umlambonja. On the other, not quite so sheer, the Ntonjelana glittered like a steel thread at the bottom of the valley. I seemed to be not of the earth, detached, remote, suspended in mid-air. Clouds were gathering, and the mutter of distant thunder drove me down in a hurry. Back to camp, to watch the storm break over South Saddle. Remembered the cheese at supper but could not find it. Hell, but those baboons were real connoisseurs! They must have finished their meal with biscuits and cheese!

Tuesday, October 7, 1947. Up early, and off to the summit again. Making for my first beacon of Sunday, I worked in a northerly direction this time, fixing plane-table points along the escarpment edge. Reached head of Ntonjelana Pass, and met a cavalcade of 13 pack-horses carrying mealies, and three Basotho in pink balaclavas and red and green blankets. The Ntonjelana Pass is one of the main routes between Natal and Basutoland. This party was probably taking mealies, purchased in Bergville or Winterton, back into the kraals of Basutoland, in exchange for their wool. I descended half way down the pass in order to get some cross-shots on to the Cathedral Range, now to the south of me. This is a view seldom seen by the ordinary tourist, and was grand beyond all telling — Cathedral and the Bell heaving themselves up into the sky; Outer Horn and Inner Horn, grim and forbidding; the Chessmen, peak on minor peak; the Mitre and the Twins. I could just see the cave in the distance, across the valley.

There are two Ntonjelanas, Ntonjelan' ephumalanga, and Ntonjelan' eshonalanga (Ntonjelana of the Dawn and Ntonjelana of the Sunset) i.e. East and West. I was at the head of the former, and a lovely valley it looked, green and beautifully wooded. I had never been into it before. I was able to map all the headwaters and tributaries of this stream — a good day's work — and was back in camp, pretty tired, by midday.

In the afternoon I climbed up to a narrow ledge, halfway up the south-west Twin, with my book, a pocket edition of Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*, and all the world laid out below me. Here for a brief while I sat as quietly and as free from care as ever old Izaak used to do under his sycamore tree, and wandered with him the pleasant meadows and the scented cowslip banks beneath Amwell Hill.

I have finished my work on the summit, and I think I shall drop down into the Ntonjelana of the Dawn tomorrow, a day earlier than I had planned. I don't want to be caught up here in bad weather, and it might change at any moment. It is a glorious afternoon, the only sound being the sighing of the wind in the crags. Down below, miles it seems, but really only a few thousand feet, the Ntonjelana threads its way through the valley. Beyond, range upon range of smoke-blue hills stretch away into the Free State, with South Saddle, noble peak, standing guard over it all. I have just watched an eagle having a bit of sport with a dassie. The eagle swooped by with a 'woosh' of its wings, the dassie struggling in its claws. Suddenly the dassie broke loose and fell, but the eagle wheeled and dived, caught it again, and was off.

After supper that night I took my pipe and coffee out as usual on to the slope in front of the cave for the last time, to watch the sunset. A storm was brewing, thunder was growling and muttering amongst the crags to the north. I don't think I have ever seen more remarkable colouring. A queer, greenish light seemed to pervade everything. Away in the distance Eastern Buttress and Devil's Tooth glowed a rich ultramarine. The Outer Mnweni Needle and its attendant foothills were draped in a paler green, while nearer, South Saddle and the whole line of the Berg gleamed a dark jade, unearthly and macabre. I watched breathlessly when suddenly one single peak, far-off Mponjwane jutting up above South Saddle, shone out a fiery, smoky red, as if lit by internal fires, a crimson finger in a world of green. It must have just caught the last rays of the setting sun. For two minutes it seemed to throb and glow with red heat. Then the scene darkened. The nearer peaks turned jet black; the Mnweni Mountains and the far Amphitheatre still burned blue, while the sky turned a dull, angry red. Then, as if a gigantic hand had moved across the scene, all colour was wiped away. The reds and the blues and the greens drained off, and the stars were shining in a jet-black sky.

Wednesday, October 8, 1947. The afternoon of a strenuous morning. I am sitting at the entrance of my new home, the Ntonjelana Caves. I am not sorry to reach this pleasant land. The top is grand beyond all telling, but it is an austere grandeur, and life there is always a battle, a battle for warmth, a battle for water, a battle for firewood, a battle against fatigue, sometimes a battle for life itself. The air is thin, and you use up energy at a terrific rate, living at twice the pace you do at lower altitudes. You do not sleep much: you do not need much sleep. Around are bare rocks, no trees, and little grass. Stunted bushes, six inches high, provide variety and firewood. Life is lean and streamlined. Down here, in the valleys of the Little Berg, the air is mild, the grass is lush; there are flowers and the sound of running water, and trees with cool shade, and the glow of your camp fire at night is warm and relaxing. I think I know what Abraham must have felt when he reached the Promised Land after his long trek across the desert.

I had left Twins Cave at 7.15 am, again with a heavy pack, and had entered what was new country to me, with only a map to guide me. I headed straight down from the cave into the valley below, five thousand feet, taking it easily, and reaching the bottom in a couple of hours. Then a pleasant walk of an hour over gentle grass slopes brought me to the caves. Their position was marked roughly on Sweeney's map, and I found them without much difficulty. They are in a lateral valley of the Ntonjelana, a tiny, wooded gorge, a truly lovely spot. The caves are high up in the gorge, very roomy, with a large waterfall flowing over at one end, right under the south face of South Saddle. In front one looks out over the yellowwoods and down into the gorge where the stream murmurs. Saddle Peak dominates all. The continuous sound of the waterfall is like music after the monotonous drip-drip-drip at Twins Cave, into the billy-can, regularly every ten seconds. I can see the white flash of the waterfall through the green as I write.

I celebrated my arrival by going down to the stream for a plunge. Water was far too precious up on top to waste on washing. I found a lovely pool of frothing water, and it was icy cold. It was the first time I had had my clothes off since leaving the hotel. I spent the afternoon getting the cave shipshape, building a fireplace, checking supplies and writing up my Log. Later on a storm broke, but it soon cleared, and the night was clear and starlit. I sat by a roaring fire with Izaak Walton, and had a grand evening[1].

Thursday, October 9, 1947. After breakfast at 6 am I left the cave and set off up the slope. The job was to map the whole of the Cathedral Range, from the Twins to the Three Puddings. I first of all climbed half way up South Saddle, where I took my first shots. I then made my way eastwards along the crest of the ridge between Saddle Stream and Ntonjelan' ephumalanga, running parallel to the Cathedral Range. This was the ridge which John Peck had climbed in July 1945, when he was mapping the Rockeries area, the day we sub-camped in Saddle Stream. To the north I could see the spot where we had camped, away down in the valley. Above it was the ridge in which our cave had been situated, and North Saddle, and the two Mnweni Needles and Rockeries Tower, and the pass we had struggled up in a howling gale, two years previously. In the other direction, the Cathedral Range, steel-blue in the early morning light. I should imagine that this ridge, on which I was working, would give one one of the finest panoramas in the whole of the Drakensberg. I finished my job by midday, including a complete photographic record, and then made off up the ridge and so back to the cave. I arrived home pretty well all in, and slept most of the afternoon. The heat had been terrific during the day, and I had been at it for six days with hardly a break. I woke up at 5 pm to the crash of thunder reverberating through the gorge. It was the biggest storm we had had so far. Spent the evening again by the fire with my book. Still pretty tired — I shall have to have a couple of days off.

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[1] One of the joys of mountaineering in the Drakensberg in the early days was the camp fire round which one relaxed after the day's climb. Today, sadly, lighting of fires in the Drakensberg is prohibited.

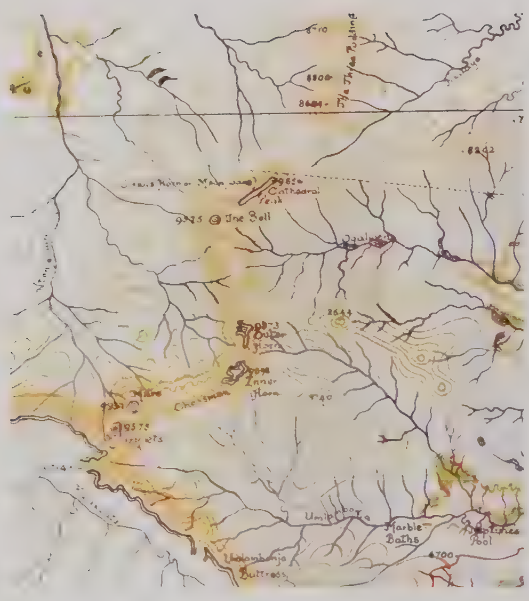
Waterfall Cave on the lower slopes of South Saddle, which the author used as his base while mapping the Cathedral area in 1947

John Hone

Friday, October 10, 1947. Woke up this morning and found the gorge blanketed in mist. Luckily I had decided to take at least one day off, so it doesn't matter. Lazed in bed, and had a late breakfast. (By late I mean 6.30 am instead of 5.30!) Spent an hour or so checking over the map, and then snuggled down with my book.

I have been trying to work out why I do this sort of thing. Here I am, a fairly respectable member of society, living in a cave miles away from civilisation, in unknown country, doing my own cooking, getting tired, and hot, and dirty, and enjoying it. It is too easy to say I needed a change, or that the peace of nature drew me, or that I had a job of mapping to do. Why do it at all? I don't think it is entirely because of the love of nature. It goes deeper than that. I have a theory that it is a deep-seated, subconscious protest against all the artificiality and ease of modern civilised life. We lead such superficial lives, in square houses, in regimented streets, where the procuring of the essentials of life — food, clothing, shelter — is no problem at all. These things are no further off than the nearest telephone. Life was not meant to be like this. Here I have only myself to depend on. I have to find shelter, I have to carry my own food and bedding with me, I have to find my own way without signposts. If I conk in or get lost, or the weather changes, I have only myself to rely on to get me out of the mess. If I sprain my ankle, I can't telephone the nearest doctor. There is no-one to help me. And life is reduced to the essentials — food, warmth, shelter. It is simplified. I believe it is good for a man that he should sometimes break loose and go primitive once again. And all this does not mean to say that I shall not appreciate a soft bed, a decent meal, my wife and my children, my books and my job, when I get back!

Mist lifted about 11 am. Went out photographing, back for lunch, read and slept during the afternoon. By supper time I was really hungry: during the last few days I have had to ration myself very carefully in order to come out, and the food position is quite a problem. I shall probably have enough if I go carefully, but the monotony of the diet is beginning to tell. I am trying experiments to vary it. Yesterday, for instance, I made a pudding for lunch out of the powdered rusks I had left, chocolate, sugar and dried milk boiled up into a mush and seasoned with raisins. Today, stewed prunes and apples (usually eaten dry), served with cream (dried milk at double strength). My mouth fairly waters when I think of the cheese and biscuits and the eggs those baboons wolfed. May the dirty blighters rot in hell for it! I am still pretty tired, and shall take tomorrow off.



A section of Reg Pearse's Drakensberg map

It is going to be a long march home. I shall leave here the day after tomorrow. I calculate I am about one and a half days' march off from the hotel (I intend making my way down the Ntonjelana, up the Cathedral Ridge, past the Three Puddings, and so home via Ganapu Ridge). That should get me in about midday Monday, but I think I shall try and do it in one day. (The reason for this is not the vision of a nice, juicy steak awaiting me when I get in!) The only thing that worries me is the possibility of mist. Then I should be in real trouble. I shall be travelling through unknown country. I could find my way on a clear day, but not in mist, through the maze of ridges and valleys that lie between me and the hotel. If the mist comes down, I shall have to 'stay put' until it clears, in which case a long-suffering Education Department will give me the sack for not being back on time — unless I die of starvation meanwhile!

The usual storm in the afternoon, and then dusk, and time to light the fire for the evening. I have been sitting at the cave entrance with my usual pipe. What a contrast between this view and the one from Twins Cave! Here, massed green foliage of ageless yellowwoods, a flashing waterfall, and only fifty yards away, the brown, enclosing walls of the gorge. There, limitless miles of mountain, hill, valley, crag and stream laid out, a patch-work quilt, six thousand feet below, sweeping into the distance. The cosiness of a world in miniature, and the grandeur of limitless horizons.

Saturday, October 11, 1947. Opened the fourth tin of meat for breakfast. I brought five with me. The previous three were incidents: this was an event! I lingered long and lovingly over it. After breakfast, went down to the Ntonjelana. It was a grand day, a day of bracing wind and clear sunlight. Throughout the long hours of the morning the endless battalions of massed white clouds marched steadily south along the ramparts of the Berg. The bottlebrushes were out in bloom, and the scarlet flame of their flowers, the green trees of the valley, the rippling stream and the steel-blue peaks crowned with the blue sky and the racing clouds, made a picture I shall long remember. It was a photographic paradise, but I had finished my last spool the previous day.

I found a shady tree beside a suitable pool, stripped, and washed my one and only shirt and pants. Then lay out on the grass with a book while they were drying. When they were dry, a plunge myself in the cold water, and for the first time in a week I felt really clean. Back to the cave for lunch, and then I spent the afternoon on the slope of the hill above the gorge. Never have I so wanted a roll of film, but I consoled myself after a while, for I knew that no mere nitrate of silver could ever fix these changing lights and colours, these blue shadows that chased over the long green hills, and the far peaks[1]. On three sides they rose, peak after peak, in changing hourly beauty, and on the fourth the broadening valley of the Ntonjelana, green and lovely beyond telling, stabbed with the flame of the bottlebrushes. And still those piled, fantastic masses of shining cumulus clouds, massed battalions of them, marched inexorably southwards over a prussian-blue parade ground. Only a painter could have caught the glory and the majesty of it.

This was before colour film became generally available.

Back in the twilight, by a circuitous route, discovering another set of caves on the way, to supper, and the cosy glow of the camp fire flickering on the walls of the cave. At dusk the cohorts of the clouds were still streaming south, but each one now was a golden glow of fire in the light of the setting sun.

Sunday, October 12, 1947. I was early astir, cooked breakfast, and then packed. By 6.45 am I was on my way. I first of all followed the Ntonjelana down the valley for a couple of miles, then struck right up the bed of the main Cathedral stream, and so up on to the ridge which carried me right up under the crags of the Outer Pudding. It was another glorious day. The mist was lifting from the peaks. The grass was crisply green underfoot, and the slopes alive with the first flowers of spring. Every little gully was crowded with blue *Scilla natalensis* and the creamy-white *Anemone fanninii*, while every now and then I came across great patches of red everlastings. But it was the grass which was so lovely. It was like a green flame.

The climb up from the valley was really exhilarating, my pack easy, my heart light, and by eleven o'clock I was topping the hills that look down into the shy Nxaye, and had linked up with the area I had mapped last July. Down into the Nxaye, where I stripped and plunged and had lunch, and then on up to Ganapu Ridge, and home by way of Baboon Rock (Memo: must get Albert[1] to change the name of this lovely rock!) Hotel was reached about 4 pm where a hot bath, dinner, and a sixty-mile drive home under the stars awaited me.

Postscript: I think I know the answer to the little problem I considered on Friday, October 10. I can best explain by a story of the lunatic who spent his time bashing his head against a stone wall. A visitor stood watching him for some time, and then said, "My good man, why are you doing this? You surely can't like it!" "Ah," said the lunatic, "perhaps not. But you've no idea how lovely it is when you stop!"

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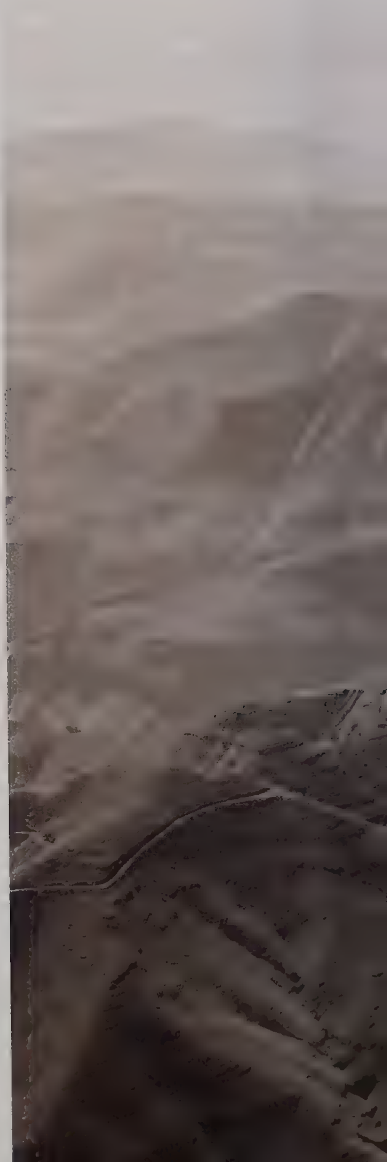
[1] Albert van der Riet, proprietor of the Cathedral Peak Hotel. He died in December 1987.

Amphitheatre from the air

An aerial view from the west of the Sentinel and, in the far distance, Eastern Buttress, with the mighty Amphitheatre wall between them

Malcolm Pearse



CHAPTER 6

CLIMBERS ALL

Great things are done when
men and mountains meet.
William Blake

The Natal Mountain Club was formed on 15 April 1919.

Actually, this was not the first attempt at starting organised climbing in the Drakensberg. In 1910 a Drakensberg Club was formed, with Mr Justice Broome as president. But the war intervened, the club ceased to function, and the only reminder that we have of it today is Broome Hill in the Royal Natal National Park.

But by 1919 the war was over. The Drakensberg was now much more accessible, spirits were high, and a small group of enthusiasts had already penetrated into the unknown recesses of the mountains, and had found them full of promise. The year 1919 marks the beginning of a new era in Drakensberg climbing history.

On Tuesday evening, 15 April of that year a public meeting was held in the Town Hall, Pietermaritzburg, with the Honourable G.T. Plowman, Administrator of Natal, in the chair. On the motion of Colonel J. Fraser, seconded by J.S. Henkel, it was decided to found a Mountaineering Club, with Sir George Plowman as its first president and D.W. Bassett-Smith as its secretary. The Natal Mountaineering Club was off to a good start. Its initial membership stood at 37, but within a year had increased to nearly 150.

Hubert Botha-Reid and party, 1919

MCSA Archives

The moving spirit behind the formation of the club was Hubert Botha-Reid. He gathered round him a band of enthusiastic climbers, among them D.W. Bassett-Smith, R.G. Kingdon, Dr Park-Ross, W.E. Marriott, "Doc" Ripley, Maurice Sweeney, and the systematic exploration of the Drakensberg began. Gradually the infant club grew from sturdy and adventurous youth to full maturity. By 1937 the standard of its climbers was so high that in that year all parties at the July Camp in the Injisuthi were led by Natal men. In 1953, after an independent existence of 34 years, the club merged with the Mountain Club of South Africa, and in 1969, on Friday, 31 October, it celebrated its jubilee at a magnificent banquet at the Imperial Hotel, Pietermaritzburg.

Dr Park-Ross (right)

MCSA Archives

A strict, but unwritten, code of ethics was soon developed, respected by all members of the club. No climbing involving unjustifiable risk was ever to be undertaken. Every climber had a strong sense of responsibility towards his companions, to whom he, in turn, entrusted his own safety in the certain knowledge that they, on their part,

Doc Ripley

MCSA Archives

would not let him down. At all times he took their limitations into consideration, as well as his own, especially if he was the leader. It was axiomatic that the accepted leader in every group had to be obeyed implicitly, and that the basis of sound climbing was comradeship and co-operation, and not competition. The result has been that accidents have been rare, with no fatal accidents in close on 70 years at organised club meets, a record matched by few mountain clubs in the world.

It was decided early on to hold an annual camp in the Drakensberg during July, and in 1920 the first of these was held at Mont-aux-Sources. There followed a series of camps, magnificently organised, superbly run, which soon became the Mecca for mountaineers throughout South Africa, and even from overseas. The only failure was a somewhat disastrous camp in 1926 in the Malutis, when the weather turned bitterly cold and the transport broke down, as did the catering arrangements. Its only memory now is preserved in the well-known camp song, *Oh, Malutis, never again!*

The organisers of these camps developed a set routine. Len Carr, the caterer, added to his laurels year after year with better and better menus, and Dorothy Robbins became the accepted organiser of the camps, doing a magnificent job which was justly recognised in 1961 by the award of the coveted Gold Badge. (This is a badge awarded annually to a mountaineer who has rendered signal service to the cause of mountaineering.) On occasions the various Berg hotels helped out with the catering, notably the Zunckels at National Park Hotel, Albert van der Riet of Cathedral Peak Hotel and Bill Gray of the Nest Hotel. Dorothy Robbins died just before the July Camp in 1979, and Kay Nixon stepped into her shoes immediately. Kay's organisational skills were appreciated by the July campers for 26 years, a fact that saw her receive the Gold Badge for service.

"There was a time when we were not permitted to make fires and had to cook on gas. This saw us making all sorts of calculations, like how much gas would be required to boil a given amount of water at different altitudes," Kay remembered. "In any event, the ban did not last and we went back to cooking on open fires."

A fine African staff was recruited, many of whom remained on year after year. However, none was more important than Ishmael Ndlovu, whose services to the July Camps for nearly 60 years was recognised by the Natal Section of the Mountain Club with honorary life membership. From his first camp in 1948 until he finally called it a day in 2005, Ishmael worked wonders on the open log fire, feeding hungry climbers with such dishes as beef strogonoff, braised cabbage and sweetcorn fritters. His steam puddings, which he made as birthday cakes, surprised and delighted many.

"Ishmael said the campers kept him young, and he was very proud of his Honorary Life Membership. I said I would stay on as long as he did, but in 2005 he said he had had enough and we both retired. He was then 84," Kay recalled.

Leaving Bergville for the first July Camp, 1920 MCSA Archives

The first July Camp, at National Park, 1920 A. Perry

Ishmael Ndlovu

Ishmael learned his cooking at one of the Berg hotels and over the years worked for most of them. The July camps coincided with the school holidays when the hotels were generally busy and couldn't spare their chef for two weeks, so Ishmael would resign so he could attend the camp. Eventually he found employment at a university residence which meant that he no longer had to quit his job as the students were away on mid-year vacation.

Ishmael has retired, but his recipes will live on. "We got him to tell us how he prepared various dishes," Kay said, "and these have been put together in *Ishmael's Cookbook*."

Ishmael retired to live at Rookdale, near Bergville.

On the last night of each camp a presentation would be made to staff. With all the climbers gathered round, and the firelight flickering on their faces and on the faces of the staff, Martin Winter would make the presentation. He would say in Zulu: "Here in the Drakensberg Mountains is the place of God. We have come from the towns, where there is the great thunder of hurry."

Emily Arnold, Dorothy Robbins, Kay Nixon and Lorna Kay. Dorothy and Kay were both recipients of the Gold Badge for their work organising July camps

At these camps climbers were divided up into small groups of seven to 10, care being taken to see that the various members of a team were suited to each other in age, temperament and skill. Each group was headed by an experienced climber who knew the area and was an expert cragsman. Meals were served in comfort in camp, on long wooden tables in the open air, and rough wood seats. Drums of hot water were kept going for those who rather shied at the icy dip in the Berg streams.

Best of all was the huge camp fire round which everyone gathered after the evening meal.

An oval space was always reserved for this, surrounded by a screen of upright tambookie thatching grass, for the night winds in the Berg winter can bite to the bone. Here, in the centre, huge logs of protea and bottlebrush wood were piled and soon the flames would crackle and leap, lighting up the climbers as they

Pack donkeys on the way to a July Camp in the very early days

M. Sweeny

lay around wrapped in their warm blankets, pleasantly relaxed after the day's climb. And soon the songs would start up, traditional songs of the Natal Mountain Club, *Old Climbers, Bold Climbers; As we lie in the camp fire's golden glow; When on the slope you grunt and grope* ... and many others, flung out uproariously on the night breeze, as it sighed in the long grass outside. It is then, as the leaping sparks fly upwards, that nostalgic memories of the early days come to the older club members, as they sit round the fire, memories of the special train that used to be provided by the Railways to convey campers from Pietermaritzburg to the railhead at Bergville, memories of the arrival in the early hours of a grey winter's morning on the station platform, of the dash to the hotel, where a magnificent breakfast of steaming coffee and smoking bacon and eggs awaited them, memories of Otto Zunckel's wagon as it rumbled into the mountains with their baggage and tents. There were no roads and no bridges, but the wagon always seemed to get there. Many walked the whole way from Bergville. The men wore knickerbocker suits and the women long skirts. There followed memories of the unconquered peaks and of forgotten climbs, of delicious homemade farm food, of bright purple Msobo jam, of the eager freshness of winter mornings, when the frosted grass crackled underfoot, and of the warm comradeship of the camp fire after the day's climb.

They must have been halcyon days in those early 1920s. A whole mountain world, unknown and unexplored, lay open to the climbers of yesteryear. With bewildered delight they penetrated into untrodden valleys, gazed spellbound into tremendous gorges and jagged chasms, and gasped in wonderment at the breathtaking view spread out below them from the summits of the peaks they climbed. In the words of Wordsworth, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive."

Climbing - in a dress! MCSA Archives

Soon the knickerbocker suits and the skirts gave way to khaki clothing. The women threw away their skirts, and took to shorts. And soon the khaki shirts and shorts were no more, and the bright colours of the modern young hiker appeared on the scene. The long, heavy roll of grey blankets was bundled into the loft, and out came the light, down sleeping-bags — blue, orange and red — and the gaily coloured anorak.

July Camp 1933 *MCSA Archives*

Beale's alpine rope gave way to the light modern nylon rope, and the oxwagon was replaced by the lorry and the car. The last oxwagon was used at the 1934 camp in the Mnweni Valley.

If equipment was primitive in those days, conditions were even more so. There were no dehydrated foods, no well-defined contour paths giving easy access from one area to another, no maps, and no roads into the mountains. In December 1920 Bassett-Smith and Kingdon, after spending a couple of weeks in the Royal Natal National Park area, were unable to get back because both the uThukela and the ubuSingatha were in flood. They had to borrow horses from a Mr Williams, who was running the hostel on Goodoo farm, and make a wide detour, riding up Oliviershoek Pass and on to Harrismith, where they caught a train for Natal.

The Cape climbers, especially, who started to attend the Natal camps in 1921, found conditions very different from what they had been accustomed to. The country was wilder and much more rugged,

Archie Park-Ross, Hubert Botha-Reid and Bill Marriott in the Mnweni MCSA Archives

the approaches long and difficult. There was often a long trek, two to three days in length, before the climber even reached the base of the mountain he wished to climb, very different from the Cape mountains, which could be reached in a few hours. Sub-camping was necessary. This was an especial hazard on the summit. In the early days it was considered far too dangerous to attempt a night out on the summit in winter. D. Gordon Mills, an experienced climber, said as late as 1930 that it was quite out of the question to sleep out on the summit at any altitude over 7 000 feet (2 134 m). It was not until 1936 that this was first tried. In July of that year Brian Godbold, Mark Frank, H.C. Hoets and Naomi Bokenham broke the taboo by sleeping out on the summit of Cleft Peak (3 282 m). The snow was waist deep on the lower slopes, and the snowfields stretched for miles around. They pitched their tiny tent on a level patch of stony ground. The stars glittered in a violet sky, and during the night their food and their boots froze, but they were well content.

Memories ... And soon the fire dies slowly down, the golden moon climbs the sky and floods the valley, and the younger ones, huddled in their blankets, creep off one by one to their tents, for youth is headstrong and tempestuous, and demands long hours of sleep. But the old stagers, the *abadala* (old ones), stay on, for sleep comes hardly to the aged. They wrap their blankets more closely around them, and the pipes come out, and the talk turns to the older days, and to the men who were the pioneers in this unknown land and whose voices are now stilled forever. And the firelight flickers and grows dim, and overhead is the beating of wild wings...

On a day in 1900 Colonel L.C. Amery, *The Times* war correspondent, stood on the summit of the Amphitheatre and gazed awestruck into the depths below. He had climbed to the summit by the easy route, allegedly with military despatches, though why he should climb to the summit of the Drakensberg with military despatches is a little difficult to understand. He descended, however, down the sheer wall of the Drakensberg. Twenty years later he claimed that this was a point midway between Sentinel Peak and Eastern Buttress, but this is even more difficult to accept than the military despatches! It is more likely to have been at a point just south of the Eastern Buttress, and this exploit is commemorated today by Mount Amery. Or, he could have come down the Inner Tower Gully, towards the south-east end of the Amphitheatre, which was a common route in the early days. This would make Amery's claim almost correct. This route is no longer used because of its dangerous steepness.

A few months earlier an even better-known climber had visited the area. Dr A.C. Stark was a retired medical practitioner, who was visiting

South Africa at the time. He was a member of the Mountain Club of South Africa and of the British Alpine Club. A keen ornithologist, he was writing a book on South African birds. He had climbed extensively both in the Cape and in the Drakensberg, and often slept out alone in the mountains in pursuit of his hobby. It is fortunate that on the day he stood on the summit of the Amphitheatre he did not know the fate that awaited him within a few short weeks. When the Anglo-Boer War broke out he volunteered for medical service in Ladysmith, and was killed by a Boer shell on 18 November 1899 as he left the front door of the Royal Hotel. The bronze plaque, let into the pavement at the spot where he fell, is still to be seen. His four-volume work on South African birds was published after his death.

But it was a group of Free State climbers who first started organised climbing in the Drakensberg. In 1908 an eccentric Irishman, Tom Casement, appeared on the scene. In 1909 he took over Rydal Mount Hotel in the Witsieshoek[1] area. Rydal Mount was the gateway to the Mont-aux-Sources area in those days, and soon Tom Casement and a Basotho companion, Melatu, commenced a series of sensational climbs. Tom was the brother of Sir Roger Casement, who was hanged by the British in 1916 as a traitor, and it is possible that Sir Roger even accompanied Tom on some of his climbs, for he visited Rydal Mount in about 1910 or 1911.

Tom himself was a lovable, great-hearted rascal of a climber, headstrong, impetuous, and with an explosive vocabulary that secretly delighted the ladies, who were always on tenterhooks as to what he would say next! He soon proved himself to be a magnificent climber and the Amphitheatre, Sentinel Peak, Eastern Buttress, and even peaks to the south, knew the call of his voice. We tell the story of some of these climbs in a later chapter.

But then World War I broke out. Tom joined up and served with distinction in the South African forces, attaining the rank of Captain. After the war he lived a roving and restless life. For a time, in 1919, he was associated with Hans Merensky, prospecting for diamonds on the Vaal River, and might have become a wealthy man. But his restless disposition would not permit of his sticking to any job for any length of time. His brother's tragic fate, too, had distressed him greatly, and he placed himself in the hands of General Smuts. It was thought better that he should leave the country, and round about 1921 he returned to Ireland. Early in the 1940s he drowned tragically in the waters of the Liffey, from where his body was recovered early one morning. It was thought probable that, returning to his rooms the previous night, he had taken a short cut across the canal by a narrow plank bridge over the top of the lock gate, missed his footing in the darkness, and fallen in. At the time he was said to be an inspector of coastal rockets, though what Tom would be doing with rockets is difficult to imagine. He probably didn't know much about them, but that wouldn't worry Tom in the slightest! A roisterous, lovable, swashbuckling fellow of a mountaineer!

From 1912 to 1914 Tom Casement was associated with a very different sort of climber. Father A.D. Kelly was a Father of the Sacred Mission, and had arrived in South Africa in 1902. He was the younger brother of Father Herbert Kelly, the founder of the mission. At the time Alfred Kelly was priest vicar of the cathedral at Bloemfontein. In his day he had been a semi-blue for tennis at Oxford, and was tennis champion of the Orange Free State. Before coming to South Africa he had done a little climbing in the Lake District. He was almost totally deaf.

He soon started climbing in the Drakensberg with Tom Casement. He and Tom were in the party that first climbed Cathkin Peak in 1912. When they arrived at the head of Monk's Ravine, where the really difficult part commences, Tom and Father Kelly went on ahead impetuously, leaving the rest of the party behind. Soon, however, they found themselves in difficulty, pinned like butterflies on the sheer face of the cliff, and neither of them able to move, the deaf padre on the one end of the rope in a position suggesting earnest prayer, and Tom at the other, purple with fury and letting loose such a string of profanity as those ancient rocks had never heard. It was fortunate that the good padre was deaf! But they managed to extricate themselves, and soon rejoined the others. Father Kelly did most of his climbing in the Mont-aux-Sources area, but there is a tradition, unconfirmed, that he reconnoitred a route up Monk's Cowl.

In June 1915 he returned to England, continuing his work in the training of Sacred Missioners at their headquarters at Kelham Hall, Newark. He still spent most of his holidays climbing in the Lake District.

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[1] Although the correct name today is Phuthaditjhaba, "Witsieshoek" is still used.

Peter Cazlet, Elsie Esterhuizen, Brian Godbold and Jannie Graaf (brother to Sir de Villiers Graaf). uMponjwana is in the background MCSA Archives

Did he ever, I wonder, while climbing those benign and gracious hills, think back on the terrifying precipices of the Drakensberg mountains which he had helped to scale? He died, after a short illness, on 19 March 1950, at the age of 77, a dedicated priest to the last.

Another noted climber at this time in the Mont-aux-Sources area, from Johannesburg this time, was W.J. Wybergh. He is chiefly remembered for his first successful ascent of Sentinel Peak. But when I think of Wybergh, it is not of that day in 1910 when he stood, the proud conqueror of Sentinel, but rather of that night in the winter of 1911, when he failed in his attempt on Cathkin Peak. He and Colonel J.P.S. Woods, farming at Heartsease, had set out to climb the virgin peak via the South Gully. Up Monk's Ravine they went, and so into the Gully. But Woods began to suffer from mountain sickness, and went back, while Wybergh went on with his Zulu guide, Nongale. The rock walls of the Gully began to close in around them, packed with snow and ice. Darkness fell, and they had to sub-camp on a narrow grass ledge. That night, long after Nongale had fallen asleep, Wybergh sat alone by the embers of his fire, looking down on the Injisuthi Valley far below him in the moonlight, with the shadowy forms of peak and pinnacle around him, and the starlight gleaming frostily on the snow and ice. Recalling those lonely hours in later life, Wybergh said: "Nights like these dwell in unfading memory with the mountaineer, and when the day comes that our bones are stiff and our backs are bent, it will be good to know that such things have been, nay, still are, for though mountain and climber vanish away, beauty never dies, nor the love of it." Truly a great-hearted mountaineer, and one who had reached into, and found, the very heart of things!

The Natal Club held its first July Camp in the Mont-aux-Sources area in 1920. The news soon spread, and the camp the following year, in the same area, was the first to attract climbers from further afield. From then on these camps were visited regularly by a galaxy of climbers from the Cape, whose names are household words in the mountaineering world to this day, and the infant Natal Club was able to learn much from their experience, technique and skill. "Oompie" Liddle; G.T. Amphlett; Stan Field; Ken Howes-Howell; W.C. West; Ken Cameron; G.T. Londt; Jannie Graaff (the first South African to take part in a genuine Himalayan mountaineering expedition and brother to Sir de Villiers Graaff); "Grandpa" Eastman; Elsie Esterhuizen, with her passion for botanising; Colin Inglis; that "Grand Old Man of the Mountains", T.P. Stokoe; Paul White; and the two Berrisford brothers, all took the long trail northwards and landed up at some time or another at the Natal Camps, and helped in the exploration of the Drakensberg.

Colin Inglis, awarded the Gold Badge in 1967 A.C.J. Oakes

One of the earliest was G.T. Amphlett and his wife, though they first appeared on the scene long before the Natal camps were established. Amphlett was a member of the select Alpine Club, and had climbed extensively in the Cape. He was secretary of the Standard Bank of South Africa, and later, acting general manager. A most lovable man, quiet, modest, unassuming, he had a profound influence on the destiny of the young Mountain Club of South Africa, established in the Cape in

1891. Said one who knew him: "His whole life was a battle for all that is noble, fair and true." He was awarded the coveted Gold Badge of the club in 1912. He died at the age of 62 in Zimbabwe, on 27 February 1914, while waiting for W.C. West to accompany him on a trip to Kilimanjaro. He and his wife made the third ascent of Sentinel in November 1910, and the same month made a reconnaissance of the north-east ridge of Cathkin. Two years later he was back, and took part in the successful first ascent of the peak in December 1912. His name is still remembered in the Drakensberg, for a peak next to Sterkhorn, north-east of Cathkin, has been named after him.

William Croucher West, with whom Amphlett often climbed, was another overseas man. He came out to South Africa with the British army during the Anglo-Boer War, liked it, and decided to stay. He settled in the Cape. As a boy he had met Edward Whymper, of Matterhorn fame, and knew George Mallory, lost on Everest. He was the first British subject to ascend Kilimanjaro, climbing solo, and often climbed with General Smuts, who called him "Kilimanjaro" West. He soon became a veteran Cape climber, and was awarded the Gold Badge in 1914. He visited the Drakensberg only once, as far as I have been able to discover, and that was when he climbed Cathkin in 1912. He died in 1957, at the age of 80, climbing to the last, "one of Nature's gentlemen and a true mountaineer" as his life-long climbing companion, Ken Cameron, once said of him.

Ken Cameron and W.C. West

Ralph Taylor

Ken himself climbed extensively in the Drakensberg. He was an insatiable mountaineer. Up to 1972 he had made 2 600 ascents of Cape peaks in a climbing career that started at the age of seven, in 1894. He died in 1974, a fortnight after his eighty-seventh birthday. (Mountaineers appear to be a long-lived breed! The Cape Town Section of the Mountain Club of South Africa alone, in 1973 had 34 members whose membership went back 50 years and more.) He had been a member of the Mountain Club of South Africa for 70 years, for at the age of 17, young as he was, the club had relaxed its rules and admitted him to full membership.

He had soon become active in the Drakensberg, and was among the first of the Cape climbers to discover the potentialities of the annual Natal camps. He attended the second camp, in 1921, when he made the first ascent of the formidable Outer Mnweni Needle. He also made an attempt on the Inner Needle, and was forced back only 60 m from the summit. This camp also saw him on the slopes of Cathedral Peak, where he made the second recorded ascent, and during the same month he made the first ascent of the ubuSingatha Gully, with Bassett-Smith and Kingdon. In the 1927 camp he made a second ascent of Mount Amery, and also climbed to the summit via the Inner Tower Ravine. Again in 1938 he was back, attending the camp in the Ntonjelana.

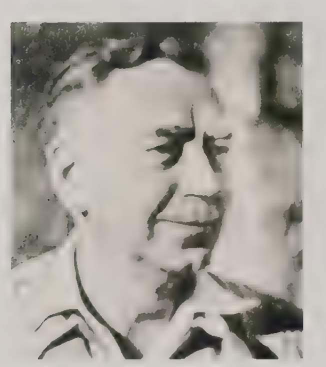
T.P. Stokoe, the botanist, also climbed in the Drakensberg, attending the 1927 camp at Mont-aux-Sources. As we have said, mountaineers appear to be a long-lived breed, for Stokoe died at the age of 93, collapsing on his last trip into the mountains, in the Cape. Professor Rycroft, director of Kirstenbosch, was fortunately with him at the time, and brought him home, where he died peacefully a few days later. Botany was his great passion, and he rediscovered many plants which had been "lost", and discovered many new ones. Several species have been named after him.

Ken Howes-Howell was another of those grand old characters to whom mountaineering owes so much. As a youngster he started climbing in the Du Toit's Kloof Mountains, and that was the start of a

'Speedy' Hastie above Ntonjelana Pass, July Camp 1931

Maurice Sweeney

long climbing career. He did much to foster a love of mountaineering among the boys of SACS. After his death in 1967 the Cape Cine Club, which he had founded in 1941, produced a film on his life, which they called "A Man of Honour". Here in the Drakensberg we were fortunate in having the benefit of his wise guidance and mature wisdom on several occasions, notably at the 1936 camp in the uMlambonje, when, with Brian Godbold and four others, he made the first ascent of the Pyramid (2 827 m), a most sensational climb.


E. Stanley Field

E. Stanley Field was really a Natal man, having been born in this province, but at an early age he went to the Cape, where he became a leading attorney. He started climbing as a young man immediately after World War I. With his strong, positive personality and his great qualities of wisdom and leadership, he did much for the Mountain Club, both in the Cape and in Natal, and for mountaineering generally. He was awarded the Gold Badge in 1938, and was president of the club from 1962 to 1969. He died two days after taking the chair at the annual general meeting of the club on 7 December 1969, at the age of 65. He attended many of our Natal camps, and made several first ascents, notably the Didima Dome and the Witch at the 1935 camp in the Didima valley.

Paul White, one of the most remarkable climbers of his generation, only attended one Natal camp as far as I know, the 1958 camp in the Mnweni. He will always be remembered for his wonderful baritone voice, rising superbly into the night air round the camp fire, and the haunting notes of his recorder, produced so mysteriously from his rucksack on the most unlikely occasions. From 1958 to 1967 he was Natal's representative on the Central Committee. He climbed smoothly, decisively, in a style lovely to watch, but this did not save him, for he fell to his death from near the top of Turret Arete, in Orange Kloof on Table Mountain, on 16 July 1967 at the age of 45.

Perhaps the most amazing climber ever to visit the Natal Drakensberg was George Londt, possibly the most brilliant climber South Africa has ever produced. He certainly dominated the Cape scene from 1911 to 1927. He was short and wiry, with a magnificent physique, 1,65 m of packed, dynamic energy. His only handicap was his size — he was often too short to reach the holds he wanted. Then he would jam the second man into a crack, and climb up and over him. But he made up for his lack of size by his sheer strength and ability and by his stamina.

As a young man Londt was on the accounting staff of the Southern Life Association. He was somewhat of an individualist, unduly sensitive, and was not easy to get on with. He often broke with his climbing companions. But he was essentially an honourable and a modest man. In 1925 he climbed Kilimanjaro with only two porters, and slept the night alone in the crater at 5 889 m. He then did an extraordinary thing. As proof of his exploit, he brought back with him the record book kept at the summit. A storm of abuse and indignation broke over him, both overseas and here, where he was heavily attacked in the South African press. Londt resigned from the Mountain Club, and for a time gave up climbing, but he did arrange for the subsequent return of the book.

George Londt S.C. Morton

In the Cape he reeled off an amazing number of dramatic climbs, perhaps his finest being the Klein Winterhoek Frontal, a climb which has been compared with the North Face of the Eiger. It involved 1 220 m of sheer, towering rock, which Londt climbed in nine and a half hours. In the Drakensberg he attended several July camps. He and Ken Cameron were the first two Cape climbers to attend a Natal camp, the Mont-aux-Sources one in 1921. Londt arrived early at this camp, before the others, and pushed on south to Cathkin Peak. He took with him the minimum of equipment, even leaving his rope behind. He finally pitched up at Carter Robinson's farm, and announced his intention of climbing the peak. Neither Carter Robinson nor his brother was able to accompany him, but they supplied him with a Zulu, Mesaga, and the two men set off. Before they left, Londt cadged 10 m of knotted riempies from Carter Robinson to use as a rope. On his way up the lower slopes he spotted a peak midway between Cathkin and Mont-aux-Sources which took his fancy. "It was shaped," he said afterwards, like the upper half of a bottle, with the ridges running up on either side in a remarkably regular manner." This must have been the peak famous in later years as the Bell.

They slogged up Monk's Ravine and into South Gully, and by 4 pm had reached 2 450 m.

By this time Mesaga was exhausted, and wanted to make camp, but Londt pushed on through the towering walls of basalt. By 5 pm they had made another 450 m, climbing fast, but darkness was now upon them, and they had to make camp on a grass ledge. That night the weather deteriorated. It was bitterly cold, and all through the long hours of darkness the wind howled dismally about the rock pinnacles. "A colder night," said Londt later, "followed by a colder dawn was never spent by me." Mesaga was exhausted and frankly terrified. He spent the night trying to light the grass to warm his toes. I wonder whether either of them thought of the similar night spent in the same spot by W.J. Wybergh, 10 years previously almost to the day!

Next morning the chimneys and cracks were coated with ice 30 cm thick, but Londt set off immediately, up a chimney, using the riempie rope for the first time. It was a grim climb, taxing them both to the uttermost, but at last they stood at the top. It was so bitterly cold that Londt could hardly write his record in the tin left at the top by West, Casement, Amphlett and Kelly nine years previously, but to Mesaga's ill-concealed delight, they set fire to the grass, and Mesaga was able to toast his toes at last! On the way down they met Robinson Junior, who had come up to join them. They breakfasted together on a small ledge.

Londt died on 13 November 1927, while ascending the final pitch of Rainbow Crag on Table Mountain. He was almost at the top when he reached up, found his grip, and suddenly released it for no apparent reason, falling to his death. He was 37 years old.

We still have not mentioned the most beloved and best known of them all, "Oompie" Liddle. Oompie, with his charm, his delightful sense of humour, his impish leg-pulls, his cheeriness, his good fellowship, and his inexhaustible store of songs, did much to introduce other Cape climbers to the Natal camps, and was identified with these camps from the earliest days. It was Oompie's greatest pleasure to give pleasure to others. He lived in Kimberley, and thought nothing of driving 1 300 km through the night, over atrocious roads, to spend a long weekend in the Berg. He never kept any record of his climbs — the joy of the climb was all that mattered — but one who knew him said: "There are few peaks between Garden Castle and the Malutis on which he has not set foot." He died suddenly in 1934 after a weekend camp in the Bainskloof area.

'Oompie' Liddle Maurice Sweeney

There is a mountain at the head of the Setene Valley, not far from Mont-aux-Sources, which the Zulus call iNtaba 'nDanyanzana, "The-somewhat-high-mountain-where-the-lightning-strikes". Its lines are mild and gracious. It rises proudly from the valley, and gazes down in calm serenity on the plains below. Oompie climbed this mountain in 1930, and he loved it. Its name was changed to Mount Oompie.

In 1931 the Transvaal Mountain Club was formed, and it was not long before its members were attracted to the Natal Drakensberg and to the joys of the annual Natal camps. Doyle Liebenberg was one of the first. He had attended Natal camps long before 1931, and soon he introduced Harry Barker to them. From then on the Natal climbers, in addition to what the Cape climbers had been able to give them, had the benefit of the experience and the enthusiasm of as fine a band of mountaineers as South Africa has seen. From 1934 onwards there were few Natal camps that were not the better for their presence. Mike and Elizabeth Burton, Hans and Else Wong[1], Tony Hooper, David Bell, Dick Barry (only once), John Langmore, Tobie Louw, Ted Scholes, Emil Ruhle, Charles Gloster, R.F. Davies, R. Forsyth, Tom Bright, Jackie Botha, and Cyril Nicholls all made notable contributions to the opening up of the Drakensberg.

Doyen of them all was Doyle Liebenberg — genial, solid, with his broad, contagious grin and the twinkle in his eyes, a magnificent

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[1] Their full surname was Wongchowski but it was always shortened to "Wong" by all who spoke or wrote about them.

Doyle Liebenberg

climber. Many a young enthusiast has had cause to bless his warm friendliness, his patience, and the allowances he made for the frailties of others. If I were in a tight corner I would rather have Doyle at my side than any other man. At the 1934 camp, as a young man of 29, he made the first ascent of Outer Horn, with "Doc" Ripley, Botha-Reid, and F.S. Brown, and the following year, on Good Friday, he made the first ascent of the Amphitheatre Wall, a landmark in Natal climbing history. In 1962 he was awarded the Gold Badge. In 1972 he published his fine book on the Drakensberg, *The Drakensberg of Natal*, and at the age of 83, he was still climbing in the Drakensberg.

Harry Barker had the ideal build for a climber — long, lean and wiry. In the Transvaal he soon established himself as one of the best of their many climbers. Led by Dick Barry less than a month before the latter's tragic death in 1938, he opened up the extraordinarily difficult Waterberg climb, Zimbabwe Tower. Harry will be chiefly remembered for his songs, many of which he composed himself, and for his rich baritone voice, rolling out the notes of *When I was a bachelor I lived by myself*, and the haunting notes of what has come to be called the Transvaal Song, *When the moon above the krantzes silvers all the veld below*, and many others. He never lost his love of the Drakensberg, and used to have a holiday home only a couple of kilometres away from my own home, under the shadows of Cathkin Peak, from where he and his wife Margot used to sally forth into the hills and valleys they loved.

Hans and Else Wong, the conquerors of the Bell, had their best days in the early 1940s. Year after year they made the long trip down from the Transvaal, and were responsible for opening up a number of new routes in the Drakensberg. It was Hans and a Transvaal party that finally conquered the grim Monk's Cowl in 1942. Hans and Else will always be remembered for their magnificent first ascent of the Bell, in the Cathedral area, in 1944. This is the peak that George Londt had spotted in 1921. Perfectly symmetrical from all sides, and shaped like a gigantic bell, it towers up 450 m from its base, and had fascinated mountaineers for many years. Howes-Howell said of it, "It is quite out of the question as a climbing proposition", and Harry Barker was inclined to agree with him. Doyle Liebenberg had a crack at it in the winter of 1943, selecting the south-west face for his attempt. He was beaten by hard-driven snow and heavily iced rocks. But the Transvaalers were not to be beaten. In May 1941 Hans Wong, Jackie Botha and Tom Bright set out to climb the peak. They, too, were defeated. "Bell, we will toll you yet," they said. And toll it they did, or rather Hans Wong did. Three years later, on 17 January 1944, he was back, with his wife Else this time. They started their climb on the east side, facing Cathedral Peak. From there they worked their way on to the south face, and then round the west side, facing the Outer Horn. The climb proved to be a little easier than they had expected, but in places it was very exposed and some of the stances were perilously small. It was a glorious summer's day, and the cliff faces were plastered with masses of flowers — red dieramas, blue moraeas and lobelias, purple vellosias, pink and white ericas, and great clusters of the scarlet *Gladiolus cruentus*, popularly known as the suicide lily. Finally they reached the top and built their cairn. They decided to call the route they had opened up the Gladiolus Route.

Martin Winter, Hans and Elsa Wongchowski, Gillian Bettle and Len (?)

Courtesy Martin Winter

Ted Scholes, who started climbing in the Magaliesberg in 1948, has at least three remarkable climbs in the Drakensberg to his credit. In August 1950 he and two others conquered Devil's Tooth, in the Mont-aux-

Sources area, an epic climb, the full story of which we tell in Chapter 9. During Easter of the same year he pioneered the first frontal route up the face of Giant's Castle. Up until then there had been only two recognised routes up the Giant, the Giant's Castle Pass and the Eastern Gully. Just beneath the final peak, on the main face, is a slanting chimney, running down from left to right, and it was up this chimney that Ted led the rest of his party, Joan Knox, G. Burrow and R. Forsyth. It proved to be a thrilling and sensational climb, and is still regarded as one of the finest rock climbs in the Drakensberg. To add to their difficulties, it was a drizzly day, and the rocks were wet and slippery. Just below the summit there is a huge overhang, and the party had to traverse out to the left, on to the open face, a spine-tingling manoeuvre that took it out of them. Eventually, five hours after starting the climb, they scaled the final rock slabs and were on the summit.

In December of the same year Scholes was in the Injisuthi area, with Lorna Pierson, R. Forsyth and Des Watkins. Here the three Triplets soar up into the sky, the Eastern, the Western and the Middle. They decided to make the Eastern Triplet their target. They first ascended the narrow south-facing gully which leads up to the nek connecting the peak to the main escarpment. Here in the gully they camped for the night, which was wet and drizzly. High above them the grim peak they were to climb towered up into the darkness. At the head of the gully next day they climbed first a spear-like gendarme, and this gave access to the south-west face of the giant peak, and a few hours later they were building their cairn on the top.

But undoubtedly the finest climber of them all was Dick Barry, although he only visited the Drakensberg once, and it was the last mountain he ever climbed. Richard Merriman Barry, the Mallory of the Drakensberg, caught the imagination of people even outside South Africa, for not only had he made a name for himself among overseas mountaineers, but his tragic death on 29 January 1938 while climbing Monk's Cowl was the first fatal climbing accident in the Drakensberg. Dick was one of those gifted individuals who, because they are beloved of the gods, seem destined to die young. As a climber he was superb. He had unusual physical powers, and tremendous pertinacity, invincible courage, and a gay, happy disposition. His knowledge of climbing techniques was profound. Always safe on rock, he moved with a swiftness, a cool deliberation, a grace and a strength that was a joy to watch.

Dick matriculated with first class honours at St Andrew's College, Grahamstown, and three years later graduated as a mining engineer and a gold medallist at Birmingham University, at the head of his year. It was while he was overseas that he developed his love of climbing. He made a number of first ascents in England, Scotland, Wales and Switzerland, the Austrian Tyrol and Yugoslavia. One of his major achievements was a record-breaking double traverse of Mont Blanc from north to south in three days, with guide Armand Charlet. Between March 1934 and April 1935 he did 93 rock climbs in Great Britain, 85 of which he led. Many of these were first ascents. With all his great gifts, he was modest and unassuming.

Back in South Africa in 1937, he was soon recognised as one of the best of the new breed of young climbers. In six short months he opened up 11 new routes. Many of these were F and G grade climbs. Mountaineering was his passion. His library contained nearly 100 books on the subject.

He fell to his death on Monk's Cowl on the evening of 29 January 1938. Like Rupert Brook on far-off Scyros Island in the blue Aegean, he had given up to the mountains he loved

the years to be
Of work and joy and that unhoped serene
That men call age.

The full story of his last climb is told in Chapter 12.

In the meantime Natal had nothing to fear! The young men of the newly established club soon showed their mettle, and built up a team of rock-climbers and mountaineers every bit as good as the best that the other provinces could show.

Hubert Botha-Reid was the real father of the club. He and D.W. Bassett-Smith and R.G. Kingdon had been exploring and climbing in the Drakensberg with their wives for some years prior to the formation of the club. Botha-Reid, or "B-R" as he was affectionately called, was the son-in-law of General Botha. An ex-Springbok of 1906, and Master of the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg, he was a man of tremendous strength and immense endurance. He had that rare gift of being able to bring out the best in those with whom he climbed. Friendly, approachable, he inspired others with an abiding love of the mountains. Said Maurice Sweeney, who knew him well: "He was the friend of all who loved what he loved." No finer man could have been found to guide the destiny of the infant club.

Kingdon and Bassett-Smith were both schoolmasters. R.G. Kingdon (he married a second cousin of mine) hailed from Maritzburg College. He had come out to this country as a young schoolmaster in 1911, and for a time coached College lst XI cricket. Both he and his wife were individualists, and kept pretty much to themselves. It was difficult to get to know them. But they were among the first to fall in love with the Drakensberg, and the two of them, together with Mr and Mrs Bassett-Smith, spent most of their holidays in the mountains. Somewhat of a recluse, Kingdon's second great love was good books, and he collected large numbers of these with discrimination and taste.

D.W. Bassett-Smith, as a young schoolmaster straight out from Oxford, found a post at Hilton College in 1914 as the school's first science master. He, too, soon discovered the Drakensberg — not only its towering peaks and the joy of climbing them, but also a world of nature, of trees and flowers, of insects and winged creatures, of ferns and grasslands, which gave full scope to his love of all living things. He later became Second Master at the school, and acted as headmaster on at least four occasions, for six months at a time.

In his later years Bassett-Smith forsook the mountains for the coast, and eventually retired there, to his pleasant seaside plot at Port Edward. He and Kingdon soon began to chalk up a series of first ascents — Cathedral Peak in 1917, a new route up Sentinel Gully from the uThukela Gorge in 1919, the first ascent of the wall of the Berg at the head of the ubuSingatha in 1920, and the Outer Mnweni Needle with Ken Cameron in 1921. He died in 1950.

Bill Marriott was another foundation member of the club. He was known to all as "Scaly", as he had once been heard telling a young girl in camp that he was "scaly with experience". He was a keen horticulturist, and his work on fruit flies was especially valuable. One species of fruit fly has been named after him. He is another who will always be remembered for his songs around the camp fire, and for his birthday parties in his bell-tent, lasting long into the night, for Bill had his birthday in July. In his later years he grew too old to attend camp, but he never lost his interest in the club, and the news of his passing, received during the 1965 July Camp, brought back a flood of memories of Old Bill Marriot, and of his songs.

Dr Archie Park-Ross, "P-R", was one of the early stagers whose memory is now legendary, with his endless fund of impossible stories, his tremendous energy, his simple kindliness and quiet helpfulness, his tolerance, and his delightful sense of humour. On the last morning of camp, as home-going parties were setting off, he would mount a nearby rock and, bearskin cap on head, would sing out in his rich Scottish brogue, *Will ye no' come back again!*

"P-R" was a senior officer of the Union Health Service in Natal, and it was quite amazing how, year after year, serious outbreaks of infectious diseases would occur in the area where the Natal camps were being held, each one requiring his immediate and personal attention! He was a foundation member of the club, and for many years its president. He loved the mountains and everything to do with them — the flowers, the wild creatures, the clouds that wove their patterns on the changeless face of the peaks, the winds that companioned the night.

"P-R" celebrated his sixtieth birthday by making the second recorded ascent of the Amphitheatre Wall by a new route, on 19 January 1939. Ten years later, to the day, on his seventieth birthday, he climbed Cathedral Peak. When he grew too old for mountaineering, he retired to his home at Hilton, and there, with his wife Mary (herself a fine climber), he dreamed his days away in his lovely garden in quiet happiness, until in 1958, at the age of 77, he set his face to the last long climb.

"Doc" Ripley was one of the most delightful of the old characters. Doc had a small, wiry, monkey-like frame (I have never seen a hairier man in the mountains!) and an ancient, battered hat that appeared year after year in camp, and his shirt always hanging out. He had a fund of amusing wisecracks and campfire songs, and a quaint American-Cockney accent ("Pass the rarck salt!"). Doc had a record of 39 camps without a break, and when he failed to turn up at the 1960 camp, there was a great emptiness. When he died in May 1967 he was mourned by many. He had a wire-haired terrier, Micky, who slept at the bottom of his sleeping-bag every night. Tough, agile climber as he was, he had a strange lack of a sense of direction, and was always getting lost. His deep understanding of his fellow men, his enviable sense of humour, and his ability to laugh at himself, endeared him to all who had the privilege of climbing with him.

Doc was born in America, in the State of Connecticut, and trained as an entomologist at the University of Illinois. When he came to South Africa in 1920 he joined the staff of the Cedara Agricultural College, an institution to which he gave a lifetime of devoted service, which, incidentally, did not cease with his official retirement in 1955. His son, Dr Sherman Ripley, until recently of the University of Natal Medical School in Durban, carried on the old tradition of dedicated service, both to his profession and to Natal mountaineering.

Doc will be chiefly remembered for his witty, and sometimes libellous, songs with which he regaled his fellow-climbers round the camp fire. He was the author of the traditional Natal Mountain Club Song, *Old Climbers, Bold Climbers,* in which he mercilessly, but without malice, pilloried his fellow climbers. He always insisted on leading his own verse himself in his rich American-Cockney brogue:

> *Old Doc, the blighter, was an expert in the bush,*
> *He never found a route except by chance,*
> *And all along the mountain-tops, in chimney and in crack,*
> *You can still find the remnants of his pants!*

The climbing record of first ascents of Brian Godbold — gaunt, lean and long-legged — reads almost like a Drakensberg's *vade-mecum.* He started his climbing career at the Cathkin Camp in 1933, when he climbed the Turret for the first time, and opened a new route up Sterkhorn, and then followed in quick succession the Ntonjelana Needle and the opening of a frontal route up the Saddle in 1934; the Didima Dome, the Didima Pass and the Witch in 1935; the Pyramid and an equally sensational climb up Outer Horn in 1936; the Old Woman Grinding Corn in 1937; the north-west face of the Mitre in 1938; and Cleft Peak frontal in 1946. All these were "firsts". Brian had a penchant for night climbing. I once watched him climb the tremendous precipices of the Inner Mnweni Pinnacle from my camp on the other side of the valley, 2 km away. He started his climb about 3 pm, reached the top about 9 pm, and then I watched the pinpoint of light, his torch, as it slowly crept down the sheer face of the peak, until it reached the nek at midnight. He was one of the first men to risk sub-camping on the summit in winter, when it was thought this meant certain death. But he tells one story against himself. A dear old lady, staying at Cathedral Peak Hotel, was horrified at the ruffianly appearance of "those dreadful men from the Mountain Club camp". When Mrs Godbold told her that her husband was one of them, the old lady remarked: "But, my dear, you seem quite nice!"

Stan Rose, though not one of the original members of the club, was one of the dominant figures of the 1930s. He was a most versatile man, the holder for many years of the Western Province two-mile steeplechase record; runner-up in the welter-weight boxing championship, and first-class hockey player. He was a skilled and dedicated climber, and was credited with knowing no less than 80 different kinds of knots! And, finest of all, thought some, he was a magnificent blower of the bagpipes! One of his greatest climbs was the first ascent of the Pyramid in 1936, with Brian Godbold and Ken Howes-Howell.

Professor Maurice Sweeney and his wife "Snib" Mrs Sweeney

Almost the last remaining member of the climbers of yesteryear was Professor G. M. J. Sweeney. Maurice Sweeney was not a foundation member of the club, but very nearly so, for he joined in 1922. "Snib", his wife, joined a year earlier. She was the last surviving member of the old brigade, and few did more than she and her husband to explore the Drakensberg. None knew it better. Snib[1] held the honour of being the first woman on Cathkin Peak. In 1927 Maurice produced the first comprehensive map of the Drakensberg, which remained a treasured item in the rucksack of many a Natal mountaineer for several years. He was awarded the Gold Badge in 1956. As a young man he took part in the climbing of most of the major peaks. When he and Snib married, they spent their honeymoon in the caves of the Drakensberg, and when the first baby arrived, they designed a special type of rucksack carrier, so that, with the baby on Maurice's shoulders and Snib at his side, they could still wander, carefree as ever, in the hills and valleys they loved. At one time they used to have their holiday home in the beautiful Cathkin area, from where they could gaze on the peaks, for, to use their own expression, they had "an enduring passion for the mountains". "Mountains are to the mountaineer," said Maurice, "an enduring passion, and it does not matter much that heart, lungs and limbs prove uncooperative. Love begets love, and if man goes to them humbly and affectionately, the mountains will lavishly repay his devotion." He died in 1981.

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[1] Her real name was Irene, but few knew it! She died in 1996 in Hamilton, Canada, where she had gone to live in 1988.

Phyllis Goodwin

And a final salute — and *vale!* — to Phyllis Goodwin. Natal is fortunate in having produced a number of women climbers of distinction. Greatest of all was Phyllis Goodwin. She joined the Natal Mountain Club in 1942, and from then on no July camp was complete without her cheery presence. She showed early on that she possessed a particularly high standard of mountaineering. She helped to open up a number of new climbs — the South Face of the Pyramid, the North Face of Mount Oompie, the ubuSingatha Wall, and the Great Arete on the Eastern Buttress. In 1946 she undertook a strenuous traverse of the summit, from Cathedral to the Sentinel. She was the first woman to climb the Column — and few men have tackled this fantastic climb — and she was the first woman on uMponjwana. She had an intimate knowledge of the Drakensberg, and knew all its secrets — the standard routes on all the major peaks; the caves, both the well-known ones and the remote and inaccessible ones known to few; the best camp sites, the paths; the water-points; the birds and the Bushman paintings. Emily Arnold, who knew her well and often climbed with her, said of her: "Phyl loved all wild things — the untamed mountains, the rushing Berg streams, the sky, the stars, the birds, the animals and the flowers."

One day in 1967 she started to climb a hill near her home at Blackridge to see if an unrecognised flower which she had found a few days previously had opened. It was her last climb. Near the top she was struck down by an assailant and savagely murdered. To those who knew her as a friend and fellow-climber she is still remembered with affection and gratitude.

No account of the climbers of the Drakensberg would be complete without a reference to the Zulu and Basotho guides, who accompanied climbers into the high places. Indeed, such fine climbers were many of them that the terms "master" and "servant" fell away, and they became fellow-climbers.

Melatu ... who climbed with Tom Casement and Father Kelly in the early 1900s

One of the best known was Melatu, Tom Casement's man. Melatu (the name means a debt) was a Basotho, tall, gaunt, tough and wiry. Father Kelly said of him that he was the only black man he knew who climbed and liked it. He claimed to have accompanied Casement on the latter's two ascents of the Sentinel, the Eastern Buttress and Cathkin. He is not quite correct about the first two, though he did climb them shortly afterwards. He certainly accompanied West, Amphlett, Kelly and Casement on their historic Cathkin climb in 1912, and he was with Casement when he made the terrifying ascent of Sentinel Gully in 1911. He also accompanied Father Kelly on the latter's climb up the Inner Tower in 1913, though it is doubtful whether he reached the top. Melatu was born about 1870, and was still climbing in 1930 at the age of 60.

Charlie was a Zulu guide whose name is legendary in the Mont-aux-Sources area. His Zulu name was Maqadi Ngcobo. He was born in the shadow of the Sentinel, and lived there all his life. When Williams was leasing Coventry's farm round about 1917 he engaged Charlie as a herdboy, and later he was employed to fetch visitors to the hotel by donkey-cart from Bergville. Later still he was promoted to guide. Doyle Liebenberg, who knew him well, has described his distinctive character — his very genuine love for, and knowledge of, the mountains, his profound understanding of his fellow men, and his roguish approach to life. He loved to pull the legs of the people whom he led into the mountains. After supper in the hut on the summit he would tell a rapt audience the story of how a party of 20 Basotho, returning from the mines, were caught in a snowstorm on the slopes of Mont-aux-Sources, and all perished. At the psychological moment, with perfect timing, he would suddenly leap up, fling the door of the hut open, and bid the ghosts of the 20 Basotho to enter! In fact Charlie had a fund of quite impossible stories with which he would regale his audience in the long winter nights. But he was never malicious, always thoughtful and considerate, and in an emergency, magnificent. On one occasion the Acutt family from Durban were caught in a blizzard on the summit. He saved the whole family, leading them down the chain ladder, and carrying Mrs Ken Acutt, whose feet were frost-bitten, all the way from the Sentinel to the hotel, a distance of 20 km.

Maqadi Ngcobo (Charlie) … guide and story-teller

In 1960 Charlie was still "guiding", well on in years by then, but shortly after that advancing age called the inevitable halt, and Charlie retired to his kraal and to his beer under the shadow of the Sentinel, where for many years he still told his impossible stories, not to the tourists this time, but to the ring of wide-eyed and fascinated *umfaans* (small boys) who gathered round him in the sun. He died early in 1964.

Mtateni Xosa (John) … guide and yodelling star

What Charlie and Melatu were to Mont-aux-Sources, Mtateni Xosa, familiarly known as John, was to Cathedral Peak. For more than 45 years John "guided" in the Cathedral area. He gave it up for a short while, and found a job in a Durban garage. The *abelungu* (white men) of today, he told me, were not like the abelungu of the old days. Today all they wanted was to sit around and play cards and drink and loaf in the sun round the swimming bath. They never even looked at the mountains these days. John was disgusted, and sought solace in the bright lights of Durban. But the call of the mountains was too strong, and soon he was back, and once again the mountain kloofs rang to John's melodious yodel. For it was John who introduced yodelling into the Drakensberg. Some Austrian tourists taught him the art many years ago. John became quite proficient at it, but the little *umfaans* who tried to imitate him, did not! Today, all the way from Giant's Castle to Mont-aux-Sources you will hear that haunting call murdered in cold blood by the little herdboys on the mountain slopes!

John had a wonderful record of safety, of which he was justifiably proud. Not once, in all his more than 45 years of guiding, had he had an accident. Tough as nails, he would climb Cathedral Peak (3 004 m) every day of the week for six days, except Sundays, when John always insisted on his pipe and his beer and a few hours in the warm sunlight. George Thomson once took him to the summit of the Bell. But the giddy precipices proved almost too much for a man even of John's calibre. When George congratulated him on being the first Zulu to stand on the lofty summit, John replied with a sickly grin, "Yes, and the last!"

Sunshine and Snow

Spectacular and contrasting colours from Nature's palette paint the sky and the snow on the upper escarpment as the sun rises between Cathedral Peak and the Bell

Malcolm Pearse

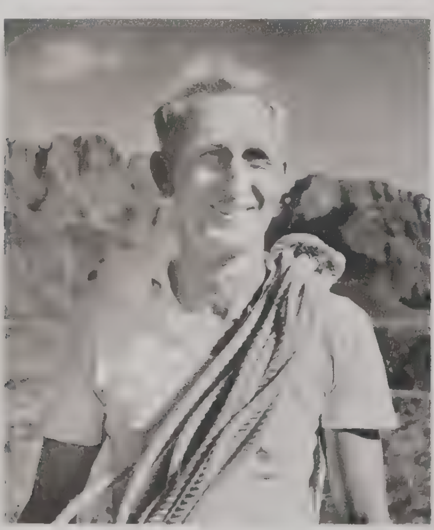
CHAPTER 7

GEORGE THOMSON

Proud to visit the margins of death.
Ernest Raymond, "Tell England"

Once in a while the mountaineering world throws up a climber who, with no training or experience, produces the most sensational climbs from the very start of his climbing career, individualists who break all the rules, and yet who "get there". Of such was Gustav Nefdt of Toverkop fame, in the Cape, and of such was George Thomson.

Thomson was quite the most extraordinary climber ever to visit the Natal Drakensberg. He was a New Zealander, born and brought up in Dunedin. In his late teens he would spend his weekends in the Otago Peninsula where, near Cape Saunders, he would often climb down sheer 100 m cliffs to fishing places. He also spent time deerstalking in the mountains of central Otago, and at one time took up rowing, stroking a champion four in 1930.


George Thomson Arthur Bowland

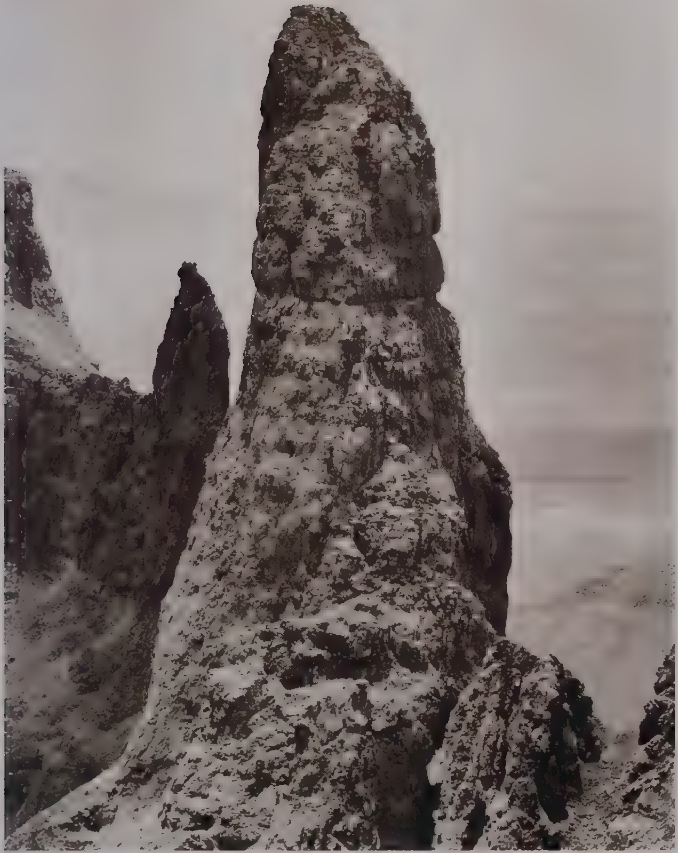
Then came the depression of that year, and it was then, late in 1930 that George decided to emigrate to South Africa. He lived with his mother's cousin in Johannesburg, where he worked in his trade as a carpenter. During the next few years he returned twice to New Zealand, and also visited England. It was on this trip that he met his first wife, Isabel Nicholas, who had been born in Potchefstroom and brought up in the Transvaal and the Free State.

On his return to South Africa he developed meningitis, and Isabel left England to come out to South Africa to look after him. They were married in 1935, and George built themselves a home in Springs. It was there that his first two children, Nick and Julia, were born.

In 1939 came the war. George was keen to join up, and it was decided that Isabel and the two children should go to New Zealand while George applied for the army. The army, however, turned him down, fearing that he might have developed residual myocarditis as a result of the meningitis. Nick, himself a doctor, doubts this diagnosis, but he believes that it was this that gave rise to the story of George's weak heart. Actually, George was superbly fit, and never had any heart trouble whatever, from then until the day of his death.

George, now alone, decided to rejoin his family in New Zealand, but the marriage was not a happy one, and in 1941 George returned to South Africa on his own, leaving Isabel and the two children in New Zealand. But relations remained friendly between the couple, and twice he revisited her, in 1948 and again in 1957.

Back in South Africa, George plied his trade for a few years on ships in Durban, and then, in September 1943, he decided to go up to the



The Column, first climbed by George Thomson in 1945 Malcolm Pearse

Drakensberg, where he was employed by Albert van der Riet, who was building his Cathedral Peak Hotel.

George had never climbed a mountain in his life before, but in the intervals of building he would look up at the majestic peaks around him, and soon be decided to have a crack at them. He did not know the first thing about mountaineering. He did not know that you should never climb alone. He did not even know that you should always use a rope, especially for the descent, until the fellows of the Natal Mountain Club got hold of him and taught him. But he tackled alone, and without rope, and conquered, peak after peak in the Drakensberg that had never been climbed before.

His energy was phenomenal. I knew him to set out from the hotel at first light with a couple of companions, climb several peaks steadily, and without a break throughout the day, and arrive back just before dark. His companions were exhausted, but George promptly attacked a four-course dinner, and then danced well on into the small hours!

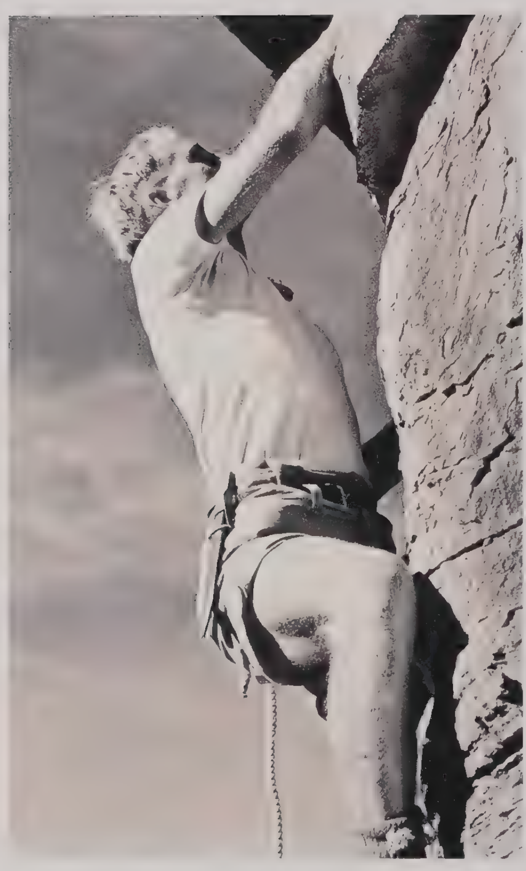
His most remarkable climb was undoubtedly the Column. The Column towers up from the Tseketseke valley, a terrifying 500 m of sheer, incredible rock, like a huge, protruding fang. Halfway up the face is protected on all sides by a tremendous overhang. It had never been climbed, and according to every knowledgeable expert, never would be.

One day in December 1945 George decided to have a go at it. He collected three other climbing companions to accompany him, Philip Getliffe, Kenneth Lapping and Esme Tainton. Arrived at the base of the peak, they realised that time did not permit of all four making the climb, so Kenneth and Esme dropped out, leaving George and Philip Getliffe to make the climb alone. Kenneth and Esme crossed the Tseketseke River and climbed a short way up the escarpment, from where they watched the climb.

Soon after starting the climb George, in the lead on the sheer face of the cliff, reached the end of his length of rope (30 m), but could find no suitable stance from which to belay Getliffe. Nine metres above him, however, was a good stance. George called down to Getliffe to climb up the 9 m, bringing the rope with him. With the extra rope now available George reached his required stance. He then called down to Getliffe to come on up and join him.

But Getliffe had misunderstood him, and instead of climbing the 9 m, had untied the rope from his body. There was now a 9 m gap between the two men. Getliffe could not reach George, and George could not abseil down to rejoin Getliffe. To enable Getliffe to return safely to the bottom, George threw the rope down to him, and then calmly proceeded to climb the peak alone, and without rope.

George Thomson (in front) leads the way to the Column



George Thomson Arthur Bowland

Slowly, inch by inch he worked his way up the sheer face of the peak, up and over the overhang, across the final slabs with scarcely a toe-hold, while his friends watched, spellbound, from down below. At last he heaved himself over the final rocks on to the summit, and stood there, the first human being to do so, a tiny speck against the blue of the sky.

If the ascent had been extraordinary, the descent, without rope, must have been terrifying, even for a man of George's iron nerve. Soon after he left the summit on the way down, he lost his route. He found himself on a narrow ledge, less than a metre wide, with no way down from it and no way of reversing his climb and climbing back. He was alone, on top of a most exposed, detached peak, without rope, and a sheer drop of nearly 500 m below him.

There are two slightly different stories as to what happened next. John Poppleton, who often climbed with George, tells how George examined the rock face below him. He decided that there was just a chance that he might be able to climb down the cliff face to the next ledge. But he knew that the almost inevitable would happen and that he would come off. About 4 m below him, however, was a small bush. He reckoned that there was just a chance that if he did come off, he might be able to grab the bush. And that is exactly what happened. He launched himself on the descent, came off, and went hurtling down the sheer face. Skilfully, and with perfect timing, he steered himself towards the bush, grabbed it as he flashed by, and it held. If he had missed it he would have plunged nearly 500 m to his death.

George told me the story rather differently. "Soon after I left the top," he told me, to the best of my memory, "I found myself on a narrow ledge about three feet wide. There appeared to be no way down from it, and I was unable to reverse the climb. But about twelve feet below me was another ledge, also about three feet wide. There was only one thing for it. But I said to myself, 'George, my boy, the longer you look at it the worse it gets, so — just you jump!' I jumped, landed on the ledge, failed to keep my balance, and fell straight into a vertical chimney. As I hurtled down I managed to slow up my descent by pressing my legs and arms against the walls of the chimney, and suddenly, miraculously, I found myself caught in the branches of a small bush. It held, and I was saved. I was a bit shocked, and I had a nasty gash on my leg, but," he said with a grin, "I'd made it."

But his troubles were not yet over. His next pitch was an F standard grass pitch, more dangerous even than F standard rock, for rock is at least firm, while a grass slope at that angle offers neither foot nor handhold). This was nearly as unpleasant as the chimney down which he had fallen, but he managed it, and then continued steadily on down severe rock until, several hours later, he was down and off the mountain.

Two years later Jannie Graaff called the Column "In all probability the most difficult peak in the Union". And it had been climbed by a novice, solo, and without rope!

The Column taught George a lesson. It was after this that he began to learn the technique of roping, and soon he became an expert.

I shall always remember my first meeting with George. It was in 1946, soon after I had started mapping the Cathedral area. I pitched up late one afternoon at Twins Cave, and had just finished unpacking when a wiry-looking man of about 40, with a tremendous pack, walked into the cave. We greeted each other — he was on his way, he said, to the Rockeries area. I made him a cup of coffee, and after supper we settled down round the camp fire, I with my pipe. "Done much climbing in this area?" I asked. "Oh, just a bit," he said, "nothing very much." He seemed to be far more interested in what I was doing. Next morning we went on our respective ways, and it was not until a week later, when I returned to the hotel, that I discovered that my friend of that night had been the famous George Thomson.

George's first climb was round about 1943. He set out for the Pyramid one day with Stan Rose who had been in the party which had made the first ascent in 1963 together with several others. Stan was on recuperative leave and George had never climbed before, so that for both men this was something of a trial day. Stan, of course led, but when they arrived at the crux pitch he did not feel quite up to it. George asked if he might take over, and to the astonishment of his companions, he went through to the top like a veteran, first on the rope. After that there was no holding George, and there were few weekends that did not see him out in the mountains.

But it was not only his rock-hard nerve. It was, also, his tremendous stamina that made him the climber he was. Tuesday, 23 September 1947 was a clear sunny day in the great basin of the Amphitheatre, in the Mont-aux-Sources area. Sitting on the edge, not far from Beacon Buttress, were two young people, admiring the tremendous view stretched out below them, Tom Pinkney and a girl, Marjorie Franklin. Below them was a drop of more than 500 m. Tom stood up, suddenly appeared to be in distress, and then pitched forward and went over the edge. His body landed on a ledge, 280 m down.

In order to recover the body the authorities immediately enlisted the help of George. He came over from Cathedral Peak, and he and Peter Pope-Ellis, warden at the time of the Royal Natal National Park, attempted to climb up from the bottom, but failed. The following day, with a third companion, Peter Henning, they went up the bridle path to the summit, and at 2 pm they went over the edge at Beacon Buttress Gorge. Two Forest Guards let them down to the first ledge on a length of rope, and then threw the rope down after them. There was no turning back.

By nightfall they were down on a narrow ledge, level with the body, and about 50 m away from it, but in between was a sheer rock face. Here they camped for the night.

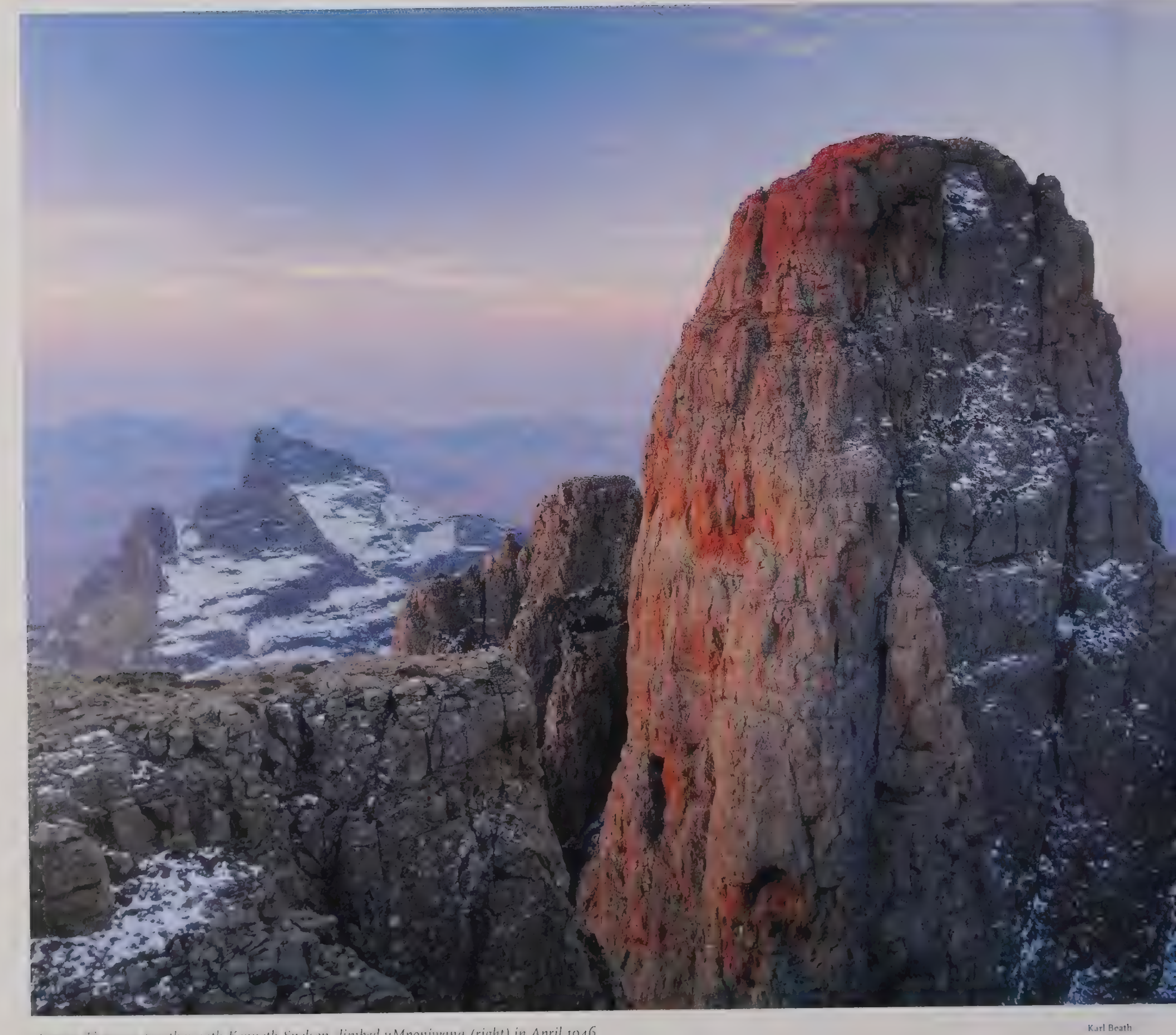
Twenty-four hours of stark terror lay ahead of them. At 8 pm the weather changed. It started to rain. By midnight a blizzard had blown up. Weary and frozen, with no blankets or sleeping bags, the three men crouched, shivering, through-out the night on their narrow ledge, taking it in turns to be the middle man. Every now and then the silence was broken as great boulders, loosened by the rain, came tumbling down the mountainside.

Next morning it was still snowing, and the mountain was shrouded in mist. It was impossible to reach the body, and the only escape was to continue the descent down the mountainside and into the gorge at the bottom. There followed 12 hours of nightmare climbing. Peter Pope-Ellis admits that they would never have survived had it not been for George's skill, courage and cheerfulness, as they abseiled their way down the Amphitheatre Wall. They were well off the standard route, and soon lost their way on the mist-shrouded face of the cliffs. It was bitterly cold, and their fingers were so broken and frozen that they had to use their teeth to tie knots in the rope.

On one section their doubled 75 m rope was not long enough to reach the bottom of the cliff they were descending, and they were forced to abseil on a single rope. (In abseiling a double rope is used, the top threaded through a loop so that it can be retrieved and used again. When abseiling on a single rope, the top is firmly attached to a rock outcrop, and cannot be used a second time.) But George was equal to the occasion. He came down last, after tying a special trick-knot. At the bottom all you had to do to recover the rope was to release the tension on it and give it a flick and the rope would come tumbling down! One stands quite horrified at the ingenuity of a man who can trust his life to a device like this!

At midday they came to a tremendous waterfall, part of the huge uThukela waterfall, down which they had to rope, swinging down one at a time in the icy-cold water, the mist hiding from them what lay below. Eventually at about 6 pm, on the point of exhaustion, they were down, to find two Game Rangers waiting for them at the bottom with food and a roaring fire.

In the meantime the affair had aroused considerable interest, and the Natal Provincial Administration had to close the whole of the summit area to the public, so as to thwart morbid sensation seekers who wished



George Thomson together with Kenneth Snelson climbed uMponjwana (right) in April 1946

Karl Beath

to gaze down on the body. They also placed a ban on all further attempts at recovering the body, not wishing to incur any further loss of life.

A week later I spent the evening of Friday, 3 October, at Cathedral Peak Hotel on my way to the summit[1]. I bumped into George Thomson, and we spent the evening in his room together. He told me he was leaving early next morning with four climbing companions in a final bid to recover the body, in defiance of the Natal Provincial Administration ban. I was away in the mountains for 10 days, and on my return I read in the papers how George and his four fellow climbers had managed, after a terrific effort, to reach the body, but it had been impossible to get it down. They had to content themselves with burying it on a nearby grass ledge. What fairer resting place could a man wish for![2]

George's tremendous stamina was used to good effect on yet another occasion when he took a party of climbers to the top of the Cockade. This is an easy peak on the summit of the escarpment, midway between Organ Pipes Pass and the Cathedral Range. They reached the summit without mishap, but suddenly a tremendous storm blew up, with driving wind and snow. Soon the snow grew heavier, and things looked bad. George ordered an immediate descent, but, with one of the girls in the party tiring rapidly, it soon became obvious that they would never reach the hotel before dark. George decided to make for Twins Cave, to the immediate west of the Mitre in the Cathedral Range, where there was good shelter. But soon after setting out the girl collapsed. In the howling blizzard George heaved her on to his back, and carried her all the way to the cave. Arrived there in sub-zero temperatures, with the rest of the party lying exhausted on the floor of the cave, George bustled about, building a fire, fetching water, sorting out gear, and making the best arrangements he could for the night that lay ahead.

uMponjwana, and its first ascent by George Thomson, is another Berg classic. The story of its conquest is another of the tales that old climbers relate as they gather round the fire at the end of the day.

uMponjwana, at the head of Rockeries Pass, in the Mnweni area, is one of the mightiest peaks in the Drakensberg. One huge, solid block, soaring up into the clouds, it is separated from the main escarpment by a tremendous chasm, less than 75 m across, but 450 m deep. Bassett-Smith had investigated it in 1922. "The peak is perhaps the grandest to be seen anywhere," he said. "It is a huge pillar of smooth rock, rounded on the top, fully 2 000 feet in height, and seemingly inaccessible from all sides. It is too severe a climbing proposition even for baboons."

But baboons or not, George decided early in 1946 to tackle the peak. He was able to team up with Kenneth Snelson, a young naval officer who was holidaying in South Africa at the time. Snelson was a member of the Cambridge University Mountaineering Club, and he had had Alpine experience. He later climbed with Jannie Graaff in the Himalayas.

They left Cathedral Peak Hotel before sunrise on the morning of 8 April 1946, with food for four days, and made their way up the uMlambonje Pass to the summit. It was a long, hard slog, their packs very heavy (30 kg), and near the top, which they reached at 2 pm, the altitude began to tell, and their progress was slow. They pitched their tent that night beside a small stream near the Saddle, in Lesotho. It was bitterly cold, and the stars sparkled, clear and bright in a cloudless sky.

Next morning they were up early, continuing their trek northwards along the summit over ice-encrusted grass, which crunched crisply under their feet. By 10 am they had reached uMponjwana Cave.

This cave is one of the best-known in the Drakensberg. Situated in a small lateral shelf it faces directly across to the mighty uMponjwana, and is an admirable starting place for an assault on the peak.

After making themselves comfortable in the cave, they went out to the edge of the escarpment to examine the peak, only 75 m away. At first their hearts failed them. Snelson was frankly appalled. George himself wondered whether the peak would ever be climbed. "Grimly," he said afterwards, "I determined to go through with it, though I never at any time overlooked the fact that the mountain would be a supreme test of ability." After a preliminary inspection of the mighty face, they descended the 450 m to the nek between the escarpment and the peak to examine more carefully the quality of the rock. Then, disconsolately, they returned to the cave for a quick meal. They had not found even a vestige of a route on the sheer, appalling face of the giant.

In the afternoon they continued their survey. Snelson went south, in the direction of Rockeries Pass, and George climbed to some higher

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[1] This is the trip I have already described in Chapter 5. See page 92.

[2] The full story of this epic climb is told in *Dragon's Wrath* by R.O. Pearse and James Byrom (Revised edition: Jonathan Ball 1997).

The view from uMponjwana Cave

Malcolm Pearse

ground behind the cave. Here, sitting on a boulder, he vainly searched the great face in front of him for a starting point for their climb. Suddenly he saw three rock pigeons flying across four waterworn grooves running up from the base about 450 m below him. "Concentrating on these grooves," said Thomson later, "I concluded that it might be possible to ascend one of them and make a traverse out to another. At a point where this latter groove looked unclimbable, I saw the possibilities of another traverse on to the sheer face. From then on, for 500 feet or so, the angle seemed fairly easy. That was enough for me. I rushed back to Ken, whom I found waiting at the head of the pass, half an hour's walk away. 'I have found a route,' I exclaimed enthusiastically. 'How about returning to the cave, having a good night's rest, and tackling the monster tomorrow?'"[1]

That night, lying in their sleeping-bags, they watched the mists playing around the mighty face of uMponjwana in the moonlight, and listened to the wind in the crags. They thought of the morrow, and wondered what it would hold for them.

Next morning they were again up early. After a quick breakfast, they left the cave at 8 am, climbed down to the nek, and by 8.30 am were ready to start their way up the 550 m of precipice that towered above them. After climbing up the two water-worn grooves that the pigeons had shown them, they were confronted by several pitches of E standard, almost vertical. The last of these led into a chimney, and then followed two more chimneys, one of which was very narrow, and the other with a deadly overhang. They surmounted this, and then came several slabs of sheer rock, necessitating some most difficult traverses. The worst of these was a very steeply sloping slab, but fortunately they managed to find some small, undercut fingerholds in the overhanging face, at about the level of their knees, and this gave them the necessary support.

By this time they had reached the eastern shoulder of the mountain, and were only 100 m from the summit. But the most terrifying part of the climb still remained. At this point their way seemed blocked. George attempted a slanting traverse to the left, failed, and returned to where he had left Snelson. The only answer was to go straight up. This was, perhaps, the most hair-raising part of the climb, for the rock was vertical, loose and dangerous, but they surmounted it successfully, and the summit could now be seen, not far off.

Now they were confronted, however, by a terrific chimney, only 5 m high, but with a most dangerous overhang at the top. George took it. In order to surmount the overhang, he had first to find a firm hand-grip on the top of the overhang, and then put his full weight on his arms, his legs dangling uselessly into space. Feeling round for his hand-grip, he dislodged a number of stones, which cascaded down on top of them and nearly put an end to the climb. All he could find was a loose boulder, but it might just hold. If it didn't, there was nothing to stop him hurtling down 500 m to the bottom. Then, with the boulder firmly in his grip, and his whole weight on his arms, he launched himself desperately on to the upper part of the overhang, and just made it. The boulder had held. Another minute, and Ken had joined him. Now the worst was over and the rest easy — a steep grassy slope and one final rock pitch, and they were on top. It was 12.30 pm.

They built the traditional cairn, wrote their names on a sheet of paper, with the crest of Ken's ship, HMS Glasgow, on it, and placed it in a cigarette tin. This they stowed carefully away in the heart of the cairn. Each collected a piece of rock crystal as a souvenir, and at 1 pm they commenced the descent. George had by now learnt to abseil, and they abseiled almost the entire length of the climb. By 5 pm they were back in their cave, the billy was boiling, and the soup was ready. By the time supper was over, darkness had fallen, and the moon was shining. They packed up, descended Rockeries Pass by moonlight, and camped for the night at the bottom.

Thomson's last ascent was the Outer Mnweni Pinnacle, which he climbed in December 1948 with Charles Gloster. This is one of the really dangerous peaks in the Drakensberg, and their route has never been repeated, though the summit has been reached on other occasions by a different route.

This ended George's climbing exploits. In 1949 he emigrated to Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, where he worked for a time with a firm of builders. Later he established a contracting business on his own in Sinoia. Here he married for a second time. George had four children. Nick, born of his first marriage, became a missionary doctor in Papua New Guinea, and is at present practising in New Zealand. His sister Julia qualified as a nurse and is now married to a pastor in Switzerland. Andrew, born of his second marriage, took his degree in theology

Charles Gloster climbed the Outer Mnweni Pinnacle with George

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[1] This is the correct account of the "pigeon" story, as given by Thomson himself. Another version, which has found its way into print on several occasions — to the effect that near the top, where they could find no way up, Thomson saw a pigeon flying off what he deduced must be a tiny ledge, and that this opened the way to the summit — is incorrect.

George took great pleasure in introducing others to climbing in the mountains

Arthur Bowland

and then joined the Overseas Mission Fellowship and was posted to Thailand. Marjorie, George's youngest daughter, trained as a teacher, married and lives in Stanger as Mrs Bresler.

Late in 1960 George contracted hepatitis and on 5 May 1961, he died in a Salisbury (now Harare) hospital.

What are we to say of George as a climber? What of his relations with other climbers? A true climber will not take unjustifiable risks. "Climb if you will," said Edward Whymper, "but remember that courage and strength are naught without prudence." It is possible that George lacked this. He has been accused of taking unjustifiable risks. He certainly was an unorthodox climber, an individualist, sometimes impetuous, possibly reckless. In his early days the Natal Mountain Club tended to look askance at him, and although various club members did climb with him, I do not think he ever attended a July camp. He was too much of an individualist for this[1]. He did take unjustifiable risks when climbing alone, but never when climbing with others. Here, especially when he was leader of the party, he went to inordinate lengths to ensure the safety of the whole party. Novices who climbed with him for the first time are unanimous in saying that they always felt perfectly safe and confident with him. He loved nothing better than taking a novice up a difficult rock climb for the first time.

And when all is said and done, one cannot help but admire his matchless courage, his cool nerve, and the sheer zest and joy which he brought to his climbing. He loved to be the first to stand on top of a virgin peak, but he loved far more the effort required to get there, the sweat, the toil, the grim determination, the calls on every last drop of clenched determination he had. These were the things that counted. Certain it is that for years to come the tales of his exploits will be told around many a camp fire.

Why do men climb mountains? Why are they so eager to accept the challenge of the high peaks? When George Mallory, of Everest fame, was asked that question, he replied "Because they are there." This is no evasion of the question. Those who have known the silence of high places, the beauty of snow-girt peaks, good fellowship round the camp fire, night bivouacs under the stars, the long tramp home in the evening light after a day on the hills, will know that there is more in that short answer than mere evasion. It is because the mountains are there — steadfast, immutable, holding their pools of blue light between banks of drifting cloud, the air sweet with the scent of flowers. They belong to the world of cloud and wind and open skies. The mountains hold peace, and fulfilment, and healing. When men climb mountains they go in search of themselves. They seek mastery over self, mastery over their fears, a greater self-knowledge, a deeper sensitivity to the sheer joy of being alive. They seek a beauty that is not of this world. Their motives are essentially personal. The mountaineer finds a challenge there that is both physical, mental and spiritual. And the fact that death is often at his elbow is but a heightened joy, for danger is the salt of life. When you visit the margins of death you are more conscious of life, and life takes on a sharpness, an intensity, a clarity that you will find nowhere else. Yes, men climb mountains because they are there.

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[1] This aspect was discussed with Des Watkins, who was also labeled as a loner or individualist. He pointed out that the July camps were not held at a convenient time for everyone. The only reason he did not attend July camps was that, as an architect, he was allied to the building trade and had to take his leave during December. One wonders if the same applied to George who worked at Cathedral Hotel where, possibly, he would not be able to go off to a Mountain Club camp during one of their peak periods.

* * *

And so the firelight flickers on the shadowed faces, and the logs crackle and fall with a thud, one by one, and the sparks fly up into the starspangled sky, while the songs of the mountaineers float out hauntingly over the quiet hills. But always, in even the merriest song, there is the bittersweet hint of melancholy and regret, for deep down in each man is the sure and certain knowledge that though the hills are eternal, muscle and bone and sinew are not. Always there is the certainty that one day joints will grow stiff and muscles fail, the eyes grow dim and sinews soft. Always is the knowledge that this must end, and that high action must give place one day to the easy chair in the garden and the quiet pipe. And after even that … Afterwards … ?

Will there be
Bright lights of noon
That leap on running water
And laugh back the sun,
Tall green trees
Drowsy with dreams,
And cool green shade –
Lush green grass too?

Will there be
The lilt of seas
Softly murmurous
Upon white shores;
And mountain spires
Grey-aged with silence,
Sad sunset's afterglow –
White moonlight, too?

Will there be
The sheen of eyes
That smile, and smiling give
Ease and quietude;
And distant stars,
Laughter, and velvet night,
And voices raised in song –
Quiet voices too?

And Afterwards –
Shall I know
The still white wine
Of Beauty's self,
The strong red wine
Of Beauty's love,
And shall I drink of these –
Afterwards?[1]

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[1] *"Icarus"*, in the Mountain Club journal, 1949.

PART TWO

In which the reader, surveys the scenery,
and watches some of the characters in action

CHAPTER 8

GHOST HOTEL

Ringed in the camp fire's golden glow
We sing of the days of long ago;
We sigh at sorrows long foregone,
At hearts that loved and eyes that shone.
Song of the Transvaal Mountain Club (Harry Barker)

It was a crisp, winter's afternoon in 1967. I stood under the ruined veranda of an old building in the Witsieshoek area. The windowpanes were all broken, the gutters falling down, one wall leaned drunkenly out, a huge gap between it and the other wall, and the wind sighed drearily through the sagging roof. It was ringed round with smoke-blue mountains, and over all hung the brooding precipices of Mount QwaQwa, enigmatic and silent.

The old Rydal Mount hostelry, demolished in 1969 R.O. Pearse

This tumbled-down ruin was once the Mecca of travellers from all over the world. To it came the climbers of long ago, from far and near, for it was the only means of access to the famed Mont-aux-Sources, and to the wonders of the Drakensberg. Its name was Rydal Mount. On that winter's day the only sound in the spacious rooms that once echoed to the laughter of relaxing guests was the sigh of the wind and the muted chatter of the occasional umfaans, who gazed with curious eyes through the broken windowpanes. I wandered, fascinated, through the deserted rooms, peopled only by the ghosts of men and women long since dead.

Rydal Mount lies in the Witsieshoek (now Phuthaditjhaba) area, due west of Harrismith, in the angle formed by the arm of the Drakensberg running north-east from Mont-aux-Sources into the Transvaal, and the Malutis running north-west into Lesotho. "Witzieshoek," wrote J.J. Ross in 1928 (he was the superintendent of the Witsieshoek Mission Station) "with its proud and lofty mountains, clear water and lovely surroundings, is surely one of the most beautiful places in our land. The climate, though cold in winter ... is amazingly healthy. When the mountains are covered in snow in winter, one cannot cease from gazing at them; and after the first summer rains, when the mountains and the high hills are clothed in a rich green, and the streams foam and froth over the stones and waterfalls, then, indeed, is a tramp through the mountains healthy, strengthening and inspiring both for soul and for body."

Rydal Mount owes its origin to Herbert Smith, who, with three brothers, arrived in the Witsieshoek area from Pietermaritzburg, round

Namahadi Pass

about 1880. Herbert started to farm, and built a rough farmhouse on the gentle slope of a hill facing Mount QwaQwa. But he soon realised the potentialities of the place from a tourist point of view. To the south, heaving up into the blue African sky, was the Sentinel, and the Amphitheatre, only 8 km away, and easily accessible via the Namahadi Pass. This pass lies roughly at the junction between the main Drakensberg Range and the Malutis, which form the northern boundary of Lesotho. In the early days it was one of the chief highways from the lofty Lesotho plateau down into the plains of the eastern Free State. It was formerly known as Mopeli's Pass, or Monontsa's Pass, and it is about 1,5 km west of the present chain ladder, near the source of the Eland's River. It was also known at one time as the Gould-Adams' Pass[1]. To the west were the Malutis, haze-blue in summer, snow-capped in winter. While lacking the grandeur of the main Drakensberg, they were very lovely. To the north were the huge red precipices of Mount QwaQwa. This was a tremendous sandstone block of a mountain, and it seemed to dominate the whole area. It was the home of the mountain eagles, and offered closer, and easier, climbs than the Amphitheatre. In 1890 Smith started taking in paying guests, and soon the place began to be known for its warm, genial hospitality, and as a starting point for those to whom the mountains called.

In 1909 it was taken over by the eccentric Irishman we have already met, Tom Casement, brother of the notorious Sir Roger Casement. Sir Roger at the time was the British Consul in the Belgian Congo, and visited his brother soon after Tom had taken over the place. It was Tom who finally converted the old farmhouse into a roomy and comfortable hotel, with outside rooms, and a dance floor. Soon holiday makers from far and near were descending on the place.

These days under Tom Casement were the best days the hotel was ever to know. Railhead was at Aberfeldy, 35 km away, or through Kestel Road (52 km), and Tom ran a coach service to bring his guests to the hotel. But the roads were little better than wagon tracks. There were no bridges, and wet weather could mean flooded rivers, and travellers held up for weeks at a time. During holiday seasons, especially at Christmas, Tom's transport was unable to cope with the crowds, and local farmers from all around piled in to help. The roads were choked with American buckboards, spiders, buggies, dog-carts, wagonettes and traps of every description, as they all took to the roads to bring Tom's guests the 35 km to the hotel. Great clouds of dust hung above the roads over the Free State plains, as the buggies all converged on the little inn, with whips cracking and the drivers shouting raucously. At the end of one Christmas season more than 600 guests had enjoyed Tom's hospitality. Days were spent in riding and hiking through the lovely country of Witsieshoek, where the Eland River flowed, and in the evenings ladies in their bustles and moustachioed gentlemen in their stiff Edwardian collars and Norfolk jackets danced long into the night to the fiddles and the castanets.

Most famous of all was the trip to the summit, organised to the last detail by Tom, himself no mean mountaineer. Parties would leave on horseback in the early morning, and ride through the pleasant valleys of the Eland to the foot of the Namahadi Pass. Here they would sleep the night in Suai's Cave.

It is to be hoped that the ghosts of past occupants did not haunt the dreams of the tired riders, for blood had been shed years ago in this cave at the foot of the quiet mountains. A party of raiding Bushmen had caught two of the herdboys of Moshoeshoe, and had gouged out their eyes. It was a time of blood, and blood could only be answered by blood. The spearmen of Moshoeshoe gathered one night to avenge the deed. They surrounded Suai's Cave, where the Bushmen were sleeping. At three in the morning they leapt in to the attack, and all, old men, women and children, were hacked to death, all except the young girls, who were more useful alive than dead. Such is the story of Suai's Cave. Next morning the riders would ascend the pass, up Jacob's Ladder, reach the summit and traverse to the escarpment edge some two kilometres away, there to gasp as they gazed at the fairest view in all Africa, Mont-aux-Sources, the 3 000 m precipices of the Amphitheatre, and the vast plains of Natal spread out far below. Here too were the uThukela Falls, the water pouring over a 1 200 m drop into the gorge below, except in winter, when it was all iced over. Then they would head back home, unless they planned a longer stay, in which case they slept in Crow's Nest Cave, near the site of the ruins of the Mountain Club hut. And everything — supplies, equipment, horses, guide — for only R2 a day.

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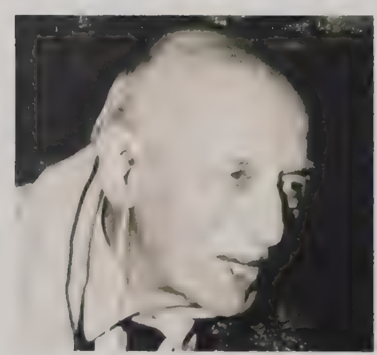
[1] Sir Hamilton John Gould-Adams was Lieutenant Governor and later (1907-1910) Governor of the Orange River Colony.

Those must have been wonderful days in the high Drakensberg, with Tom and Father Kelly and Melatu, and an occasional visit from the Amphletts, who lived in Cape Town — first ascents, lonely valleys, virgin peaks, all to be explored and sampled. Sentinel was the first to be climbed. In 1909 W.J. Wybergh, a well-known politician from Johannesburg, reconnoitred the peak, but he had no companion with him, and could not tackle the climb alone. The following year, however, he persuaded Lieutenant N.M. McLeod, of the Royal Field Artillery, stationed at Harrismith, to accompany him, and together the two men made their way to Suai's Cave, where they spent the night.


Lieut. N.M. McLeod in his late nineties (1975) H.G. Symons

Next morning they set off for the peak. According to Wybergh's subsequent account it would appear that they decided to go straight for the peak, up the lower slopes, rather than up Namahadi Pass, along the summit and down the gully. It was 29 September 1910, and the day dawned misty, with a promise of rain.

The northern and eastern faces of Sentinel Peak are almost sheer rock, but the southern and western faces are more broken. It is the western face that is usually climbed today, and that is the face Wybergh and McLeod elected to climb. As they climbed up the lower shoulder of the mountain the mist closed in around them, and the wind blew bitter and cold. It was only with considerable difficulty that they managed to find their way on to the west side of the sheer face. Soon after reaching the climb proper, the mist suddenly cleared, and they saw in front of them a long diagonally-sloping crack, which looked promising. Roping up, they tackled it, and soon emerged from the crack on to a good, large platform. This, however, led them to a huge perpendicular cliff, with no friendly crack this time. Traversing to the right, they found a narrow, saw-toothed ridge, almost overhanging the vertical cliffs of a profound gulf on the Natal side, with the uThukela River far below. By now the mists had closed in again, and the dislodging of a boulder, followed by a long interval of silence, spoke eloquently to them of the depths below. The only way up was this saw-toothed ridge.

But they were lucky. The ridge broadened out, and soon they were on steep slopes of alternating rock and heather, and they made good time. Soon, however, another vertical cliff loomed up above them in the mist, and they called a halt to consider the position. Fortunately the wind had dropped, and then, to their left, they saw dimly through the mist another steep and narrow ridge, stretching up into the swirling dimness above. It offered the only hope. "A fine bit of climbing it was, too," says Wybergh, "with firm rocks and good holds, and therefore perfectly safe for the climber, but also with an abyss on both sides of a character to satisfy the most exacting lover of the sport." It got steeper and steeper, but just when the difficulties seemed insurmountable, a narrow ledge appeared on the left, which took them on to the northern face, and enabled them to circumvent the difficult bit.

This proved the crux of the climb. "A short scramble," says Wybergh, "and then suddenly the slope eased off; we looked in vain for further cliffs above us and then realised the peak was conquered."

They lingered on the summit for a brief while in the hope that the weather would clear; every now and then a gleam of pale sunshine appeared in the rifts of scudding mist, but it was not to be, and they had

Malcolm Pearse

Royal Natal National Park

Over countless years the stream has worn a gap in the rock at the head of the Gudu Falls to start the descent. Two hours later they were down at the base of the main cliffs, but it was still only midday, and they decided to have another crack at the summit. McLeod had noticed a rather intriguing chimney which he thought might offer an alternative route. Wedging themselves into the cleft, and worming their way up with feet and back, they made it, and for the second time that day stood on the summit. Once again, however, the mists denied them the view they had so eagerly anticipated, and, regretfully, they had to climb down again.

It was 29 September 1910, a date to be remembered, for it was the first page in the first chapter of the long story of man's conquest of the peaks of uKhahlamba. The climbs of the Stocker brothers in 1888 had been merely the prologue. On 29 September 1910 the curtain finally went up on the drama. On this day man set his face to the high peaks, and accepted their immutable challenge. Down the years his vision has never dimmed. And today the challenge is still there, for always there are unclimbed routes to be explored and new heights to conquer. All this, of course, was but one small facet in man's eternal search for the unattainable, in his inward drive down the ages to struggle always from the lowlands to the heights, but remember that the sparkle of the gem comes from a hundred small facets, and that each facet is important in itself. The response of the climber when he sees for the first time the virgin peak enwreathed in cloud is symbolic of man's impulsive urge to march onwards, always, into the unknown,

> *"to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield".*

It was the first page. The other pages followed swiftly.

Back at Rydal Mount, Wybergh was so thrilled with his climb that he persuaded Tom Casement to come up with him immediately on a repeat performance, and a few days later the two men were back on the peak. This time fortune smiled on them, the weather was perfect, and they were rewarded with what must surely be one of the finest views in all Africa. Not content with that, the indefatigable Wybergh was back again a month later, this time with a large party, consisting of his wife and his 12-year-old daughter Betty; Mr and Mrs Amphlett; Miss Jagger; Tom Casement; G.J. Miller, a Bloemfontein journalist; Miss Gordon-Smith; and the faithful Melatu. Only Miller and Miss Gordon-Smith failed to make the top. The party assembled at Rydal Mount and this time proceeded up the Namahadi Pass to the summit, and down the gully to the base of the peak. Again the weather was bad, and they climbed in mist, rain and thunderstorms, but eight of the party reached the summit. The first lady there was Mrs Wybergh, while little Betty not only climbed well and reached the top, but later was to develop into a very fine mountaineer herself.

This was the start of Tom Casement's climbing career. He teamed up with Father Kelly and G.J. Miller after that, and, with Tom's Basotho servant Melatu, the four men made a number of sensational ascents in the area.

Six months later, in May 1911, Tom and Melatu made their way over Basuto Gate Pass and down into the gorge of the uThukela River. From there they climbed Sentinel Gully. This is the gully which runs up from the uThukela Gorge to the nek separating Sentinel Peak from the main escarpment. Even Tom, who had nerves of iron, described the climb later as "terrifying". The gully was packed with huge, loose boulders, heavily iced up, and the cold was intense. Three large and difficult waterfalls blocked their way, and had to be circumvented. They only just managed to reach the top.

On 13 June 1913, Father Kelly and Miller accomplished a first ascent of Inner Tower. The Inner Tower consists of three summits separated by narrow clefts about 20 m deep. From the top of the Amphitheatre wall the two men descended into the nek separating the Tower from the main escarpment, and from there contoured along the south face of the Tower and into the first of the two smaller clefts. From this cleft they climbed the left-hand, western, wall, and so reached the highest of the three summits, the one nearest the escarpment edge.

The next dramatic event took place on Friday, 10 July 1914. That night Melatu came running in to Tom Casement and cried out excitedly: "There is a fire on the top of Outer Tower!" The peak had been climbed at last. Melatu set out hot-foot to greet the victors.

The victors were the same two men who had climbed Inner Tower a year previously, Father Kelly, the climbing priest from Bloemfontein, and G.J. Miller, the journalist. They had left Rydal Mount the previous day, made their way over Basuto Gate Pass, and so into uThukela Gorge, where they camped for the night.

Next morning at 6.45 am, just as it was getting light, they left camp and made their way up the stream running up to Devil's Tooth. By 1.30 pm they had reached the nek between Devil's Tooth and Eastern Buttress (called in those days Outer Tower) and from there they made their way on to the northern face of the peak, facing the uThukela Valley. Here they found a narrow and very steep gully, up which they climbed, and by 3 pm they were on the summit, perilously late for that time of the year.

By now, they were tired. They decided to spend a couple of hours resting, and at 5 pm, after firing the grass, and with only half an hour's daylight left, they commenced the descent. By the time they had reached the nek at the base of Devil's Tooth, it was dark.

They climbed a little way down the gully in the dark, and then found a small ledge, with sharp pitches above and below, where they spent the night. Nearby was a narrow crack, and by squeezing into this they managed to catch a little water as it fell, drop by drop. Better still, they also found some dead trees in the gully, and kept a fire going for most of the night. They had no blankets, and for food only 57 grams (2 oz.) of chocolate. It was too cold to sleep, and through the long hours of the winter night they sat and dozed around their fire.

Next morning, 27 hours after leaving it the previous day, they reached their camp down in the Gorge, and there, to their surprise, they met Melatu, uttering howls of delight and waving a big bag of food. "He who does not know the joy of climbing," said the good Father after this climb, "does not know what joy is, and this reaches its acme when it is crowned by the achievement of a first ascent."

Four weeks later, not to be outdone, Tom Casement made a second ascent of the peak, taking Melatu with him to the summit.

After Casement left Rydal Mount for the East Africa Campaign in 1915, it was again taken over by Herbert Smith, until he died in 1918. But its best days were over, and from the time Casement left, a steady decline set in. Water was always a difficulty. In the early days it used to be carted up from the river in drums by oxwagon, but it was scarce, and exasperated guests, coming in hot and tired after a day's climb, would be told "Sorry, no water!" Being outside of a municipality, no liquor licence was available, and in 1919 Mr Coventry, first lessee of the new hotel on the Natal side, started to cut a series of paths to the summit, making for much easier access from the Natal side than the one up the Namahadi Pass. Worse still, it fell into inexperienced hands. From about 1919 to 1922 a Mrs Enslin had it, and she ran it like a girls' boarding school, with all sorts of irksome restrictions. It must have been about this time that a ribald song used to be sung in the neighbouring farmhouses to the tune of *There is a Happy Land, Far, Far Away:*

There is a boarding-house,
Not far away,
Where the guests get rotten eggs
Three times a day!

It revived for a time under Dr Andries Cronje round about 1925. Dr Cronje added rondavels, an ablution block, and a polished stone floor in the lounge, which was still to be seen in 1967. He put in a pump and engine, and built a swimming bath. Then a younger brother of Cronje took over and it finally fell into the hands of another Irishman, by the name of Ostack. But competition with the Natal side was too keen. The new hostel at what became the Royal Natal National Park had recently been taken over by Otto Zunckel and his son Walter, and was flourishing, attracting guests from far and near. Rydal Mount finally closed in the early thirties. The land and the buildings on it were purchased by the Government, and added to the neighbouring Witsieshoek Bantu Reserve, which became the QwaQwa Homeland, and the buildings were demolished in 1969.

Only the swimming pool — and, oddly, the diving board — are all that survive of the buildings and the facilities of the Rydal Mount Hotel

John Hone

On the day I visited it in 1967, an air of sadness hung over the forgotten buildings. Two ancient oak trees still stood guard over the front entrance, but the grass had grown right up to the very doors and into the cracks of the stone walls. To the right of the steps, almost hidden in the long grass, a rose tree, planted no doubt in the early days, still struggled bravely above the choking grass, but for the rest the gardens and the terraced lawns were no more. The rooms which once echoed to the sounds of gay laughter and the soft swish of skirts, were deserted and empty. Toilet appliances had been stripped off the walls and wash basins hung drunkenly from their fittings. The swimming bath was cracked and full of weeds and stagnant water. The laughter and the bright lights were no more, the whiskered gentlemen and the ladies with the sigh and lowered eyelash, all had gone. Only the whisper of the wind in the long grass was the same as it was in those days of long ago.

And over it all broods Mount QwaQwa, serene, aloof, unsmiling, ageless. For what are the brief antics of puny man in the face of its hundred million years!

Grass grows through the concrete of part of the old Rydal Mount still visible in 1994 John Hone

Witsieshoek itself, of course, has a history much older than that of Rydal Mount. The first inhabitants, as far as we know, were the Bushmen. Then round about AD 1700 the amaTheza, as we have already seen, crossed over the Drakensberg at Gordon's Pass, the present Basuto Gate. They settled for a while in the valley, then moved on into the valley of the Caledon. They were followed by the Bahalanga, and the wars of the Mfecane, when the pleasant valley was drenched in blood. When the Voortrekkers passed through the area on their way down into Natal in 1837, they found the Makholokoes living there, under their Chief Oetse. Oetse, who was something of a rogue and a scoundrel, was a famous witchdoctor and rainmaker, consulted from far and near, even from as far away as the Natal coast. The Boers, exasperated at last with him, drove him out in 1856. His last refuge was a huge cave on the eastern slopes of a hill above Monontsa, the royal kraal of Paulus Mopeli, brother of Moshoeshoe. It was 140 m long, 50 m deep, and 30 m high. It was found impossible to drive him out of this refuge, and the only hope was to starve him into submission. The Boers surrounded the cave, sat down and prepared to wait. But one night Oetse and a few of his men crept out and fled into Lesotho. (Another story is that he trekked down into Natal, and from there into Pondoland, where he died, but the former account is more likely to be correct.) The rest of his followers surrendered, but Oetse lived on and gave his name to the area, Oetse becoming corrupted into Witsie.

The tribe now inhabiting Witsieshoek is a branch of the Basotho. They originally came from the area between Clocolan and Ladybrand. Their chief, Paulus Mopeli, became involved in the war of 1866 between the Boers and the Basotho. Mopeli eventually made peace with President Brand, and in 1868 was given the Witsieshoek area in which to live. Soon after settling there, Mopeli appealed to President Brand for a mission station to be established in the area, and this was done in 1873. Such was the origin of the well-known mission station at Witsieshoek. Mopeli, obviously a very enlightened man, died shortly before the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, deeply mourned by his people.

A few years prior to 1928, the Free State built a road into and through Witsieshoek, with the idea that eventually the Lesotho Government might carry it on from there into Lesotho, up the Namahadi Pass. This was never done. In 1967, however, the Free State Provincial Administration began extending this road on their own account up the spurs of the Drakensberg, to Basuto Gate, the old Gordon's Pass. From here it joined the original bridle path, cut by Walter Coventry in 1919, and known to thousands of mountaineers who have followed its winding course to the summit. This path has now been converted into a wide, modern motor road, which leads right up under the Witches, and almost to the final precipices of the Sentinel.

Perhaps some day it will continue on into Lesotho, possibly through a tunnel to the summit. Namahadi, by the way, is the Basotho name of the Eland River, and means "much meat". In its lower reaches the river enters a series of gorges, into which the game would be driven and killed. Hence there was much meat.

Yes, Mount QwaQwa had much of interest to gaze down upon in its hundred million years. But strangest happening of all was the story of the boat that was "launched" at Witsieshoek, "sailed" down to Durban,

HOMEWARD BOUND

Zefanias Olsen, brothers Ingvald and Bernhard Nilsen, an unknown companion and their boat, the Homeward Bound

and from there over to Europe.

In July 1883, 246 Norwegians had been settled at Port Shepstone on the Natal coast to help the infant fishing industry. The following year, however, was the worst year of the depression which hit Natal about that time. Many of the Norwegians failed, and many gave up. Three of them, Zefanias Olsen, and two brothers, Ingvald and Bernhard Nilsen, arrived one day in 1885 at Witsieshoek. Here, strangers in a strange land, far from the sea, their natural home, their hearts ached for the singing of the wind in the sails, and for the fiords and rivers of their native land. They decided to build a boat, sail the ocean seas, and return home!

They cut their timber in the forests (in those days Witsieshoek was far more densely forested than it is today), and set to work, planning a 4,75 ton boat. It was 6 m long, 2,1 m broad, and 45 cm above the waterline. The rigging consisted of one mast, a top-mast, a main sail, a gaff and top-sail, a foresail, and a studding sail with a yard. They named it the *Homeward Bound*.

By March 1886 it was ready, and "launched" on its long journey. It was loaded on to an oxwagon, and proudly "sailed" down the white ribbon of road, through Natal, to Durban, a "voyage" of some 465 km. Arrived there, it was launched, and on 2 May 1886 it crossed the bar and headed for the open sea.

They reached Cape Town without mishap, and received a tumultuous welcome there. In one of the local papers appeared the following verse:

> *Welcome, tiny craft, to Table Bay,*
> *We have looked to you for many a day.*
> *Now you have come, we say all round,*
> *May God watch over the* "Homeward Bound".

On her voyage from Cape Town she called at St Helena and Ponta Delgada in the Azores, arriving at Dover on 28 March 1887, exactly a year after its "launching" at Witsieshoek. Here they were feted and the boat was exhibited at the Crystal Palace.

But it never reached Norway. Zefanias Olsen fell in love, married and settled down in England, while the two Nilsen brothers continued on to Norway in another boat. They were the pioneers of a very special order, for this was the first boat to be built in South Africa that sailed to England, and surely the only boat ever to be built in the Drakensberg!

Yes, there was much to see, and only the eagle in his rocky eyrie knows what Mount QwaQwa thinks of it all, dreaming his long sleep in the caverned clouds.

Malcolm Pearse

Malcolm Pearse

Mist and Moonlight

Left: Streams which leap and tumble from the heights of the Drakensberg join together to meander languidly through the misty Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal.
Above: Moonlight on the peaks, a scene enjoyed by the Bushmen in their cave homes - and by hikers who camp out in the mountains

CHAPTER 9

MONT-AUX-SOURCES AND THE ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

They leap the sky,
They tear at the clouds,
Foam drips from their steep jaws.
Leonora Speyer, "Of Mountains"

For sheer magnificence of mountain scenery it would be difficult to find anything more awe-inspiring than the Mont-aux-Sources area of the Natal Drakensberg. Its very symmetry captures the imagination — the huge curved wall of the Amphitheatre, flanked at each end by two mighty peaks, the Sentinel and the Eastern Buttress, with the uThukela River pouring over this majestic wall, one of the highest waterfalls in the world, down into the gorge below. Against these mighty bastions the clouds break in glorious spray and the winds roar their sonorous song. But when they sleep, as sleep they will, you will find here the stillness of eternity, with only a solitary eagle, a speck in the blue immensity, patrolling the skyways. Colonel Amery, who visited the area in 1900, maintained that there was nothing in the whole of the Canadian Rockies to touch it, and it is questionable whether there is anything in Europe or America comparable to the 7 km of canyon below the falls.

It was one of the first areas in the Drakensberg to be opened up. As far back as the 1850s guide books of the period mention the Amphitheatre, the Falls and the uThukela Gorge. In those early days the Amphitheatre was called the Saddleback, the name appearing even as far back as 1836, a whole year before the Voortrekkers came to the area. Later it was changed to the Horse-shoe. The name Amphitheatre seems to date from the early 1900s. In 1884 the whole area was surveyed, and farms, State land and so-called Native Reserve boundaries, were demarcated. In those early days woodcutters were active, and several wood-cutting concessions were granted. Dooley, well known to today's tourist, was named after an Irish woodcutter who lived there in the 1880s.

But long before the harsh ring of the woodcutter's axe was heard in those quiet valleys, man had ventured there. Hunting parties would make their way up the valley of the uThukela, and gaze in awe at the tremendous gorge through which the uThukela River rumbles and roars, and at the mighty basalt cliffs that closed in and soared up around it into the sky.

Even the odd tourist came. In 1878 Edith Pickering[1] married Fred Kelly. She was a young girl of 19, with plenty of spirit, who had run away from home in England and come to Natal in search of adventure. She carried with her a letter of introduction from Bishop Colenso, and this paved the way for her entrance into high society in Pietermaritzburg.

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[1] Edith Pickering's real name was Edith Pickwood. Late in life she was approached by a Mrs Rogers who asked if she might write the story of Edith's life. Edith agreed on condition that all names were changed. Edith Pickwood became Edith Pickering, and her husband, Fenn Kidson, became Fred Kelly. The book appeared in 1937 under the title *I Alone*, and was published by Shuter and Shooter. Mrs Rogers wrote in the first person.

After a couple of years as a governess she came to the Bergville district, and here she met Fred, who was farming at Lytton, between Ladysmith and Oliviershoek. Soon they were engaged, and then married. Captain Allison, the Border Agent at Oliviershoek, was one of the sponsors at the wedding.

When Fred asked where she would like to go for her honeymoon, she said: "I have seen the Drakensberg Mountains, and fallen in love with them. I have been in love with them ever since, and I shall remain in love with them till I die. Fred, I would like to go to the Drakensberg in an oxwagon." And to the Drakensberg they went. Fred took his young bride to the Mont-aux-Sources area, and they camped in their wagon in the uThukela Valley, not far from the gorge.

It was one of the wildest spots they could have chosen. During the days they explored the gorge and the huge rock chasms, and gathered flowers on the grassy slopes of the hills. At night they heard the strange cries of leopards. They even came across a party of Bushmen, "weird-looking creatures, hardly bigger than a child of ten", Edith told her grandchildren in later years. These must have been among the last remaining Bushmen in the Drakensberg, though it is possible they might have trekked down temporarily from Lesotho.

Edith never forgot her honeymoon in the Drakensberg. In her old age, living peacefully at Henley-on-Klip, she used to tell her grandchildren, "I would like every South African to see the Drakensberg Mountains, to know them as I know them, and to love them as I love them."

Edith Pickering

Eight years before Edith Pickering's honeymoon, in 1870, Dr J.W. Matthews, who later became the vice-president of the Legislative Council of the Cape, had also visited the area. He has left us a vivid account of this visit, and of his climb to the summit. He stayed with Captain Allison, the Border Agent, who had his post just over 11 km from the uThukela Falls. This must have been somewhere near the site of the Royal Natal National Park Hotel. After visiting the Cannibal Caves of Chief Sidinane, Matthews left for a two or three-day trip to the summit, accompanied by three black guides. They climbed over what they called a spur of the Drakensberg, and so down into the Orange Free State. This was almost certainly over the pass which we know today as Basuto Gate. Here they entered a lovely valley, a tributary of the Eland River, boulder-hopped up it, and then, after exploring a cave with Bushman paintings, proceeded up the Namahadi Pass. Arrived at the top, they stood spellbound at the magnificence of the scene. The summit was covered with scarlet and purple heather, but it was the mighty drop into the uThukela Gorge below that fascinated them. "Stupendous magnificence" and "savage grandeur" are phrases that drop readily from the pen of Dr Matthews.

Dr J.W. Matthews ascended the Amphitheatre in 1870 and observed its 'savage grandeur' John Hone

He celebrated his climb with a bottle of champagne, and left the empty bottle in a cairn of stones with a note inside describing his trip. Then they collected some small twigs for a fire, heaped up some heather for a bed, and slept soundly throughout the night.

Next morning, after a magnificent sunrise, Matthews was again on the edge of the escarpment. Lying on his stomach, he crept to the very edge, while the guides held his ankles, and peered over. He hurled a rock down the sheer drop, timing it with a stopwatch. It took 12 seconds to reach the first ledge. How many hundreds of tourists have not done exactly the same thing in the years that followed! After hunting around without success for dinosaur remains, they set out for "Umbundi's Pass", by which route they hoped to return home to Allison's.

From here on the account of his trip becomes a little difficult to follow. "Umbundi's Pass" was supposed to lead to the "Ulandi Valley". Neither of these names is known today. Matthews says they travelled south for two or three miles to the head of the pass. There is an uMbundini Pass, south-east of Mont-aux-Sources, which leads down from the summit to Natal, but this is 10 miles (16 km) away, and not two or three, and very different from the pass which Matthews described. It is possible to descend via a very steep ravine between Inner Tower and the main escarpment, and this is certainly two or three miles south of Mont-aux-Sources, but today this necessitates the use of rope. Nevertheless, I think this must have been the "pass" to which Matthews refers. It is not a route normally taken by today's tourists.

According to Matthews, they reached the head of the pass and commenced the descent at about 10 am. It was a narrow and dangerous gorge. They climbed down for two hours, but were suddenly brought to a stop by a large, deep pool of water, clear as crystal, at its bottom. They had to turn back for some 90 m to circumvent the pool, and creep along a narrow ledge, and so down into the valley, which they followed home.

The first buildings at Goodoo, site of the Royal Natal National Park Hotel, 1903 Courtesy Doreen Chalmers

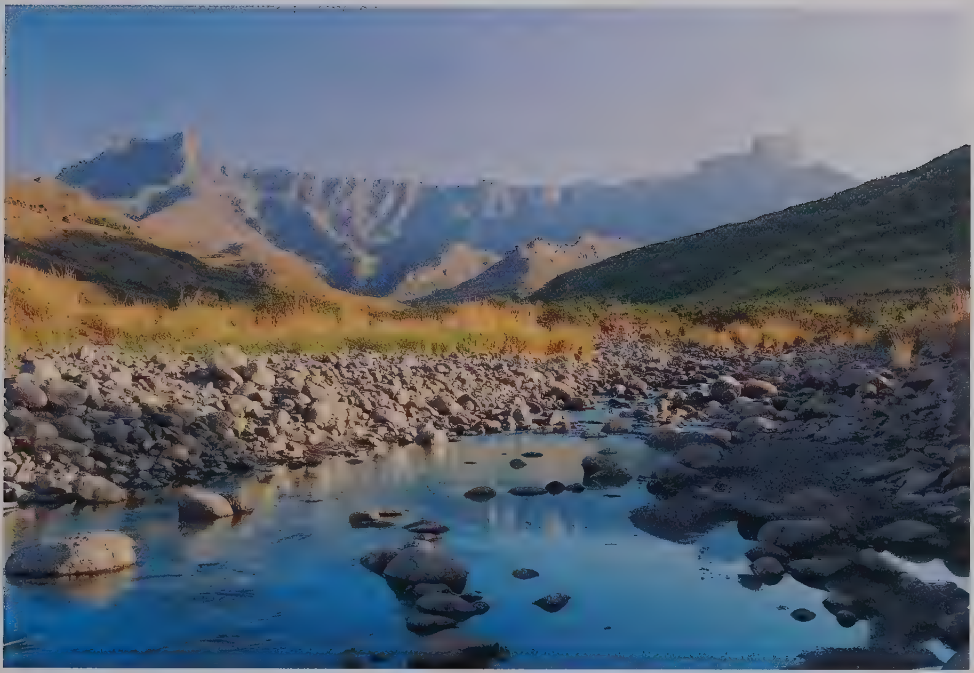
And so the years rolled by, until, in 1903, Walter Coventry bought the farm Goodoo. Walter was a grandson of John Coventry, farming at Acton Homes. In 1903 he was a young man of 27. He had first visited the area in the early 1880s with his two brothers, liked it, and decided eventually to build there. The first room of the house which was eventually to grow into the Royal Natal National Park Hotel was built in 1903. So began an association that was to last for 23 years. In 1926 he and his wife left for another farm a few kilometres away, which eventually became the Cavern Guest Farm, and which is now known as the Cavern Drakensberg Resort. He died in 1965, at the age of 89.

The first wing being built on the original Goodoo house, about 1919

Courtesy Doreen Chalmers

Few men have done more for the National Park area than Walter Coventry. His fame spread, and he soon became known as "The Man of the Mountains". He loved the simple things of life — growing things, the shy creatures of the forests and the mountain slopes, the sounds of dawn and sunset. With his rare sense of humour, his genuine kindliness and readiness to help, and his warm friendliness, he won the hearts of all who had the privilege of sharing his home in those early days. His

Willie Chalmers (with beret), Doreen to the left at the site of "The Spirit of the Woods" Courtesy Anton Zunckel



Lanz von Hörsten

Amphitheatre of Rock

The mighty wall of the Amphitheatre, flanked by the Eastern Buttress and the Sentinel, one of the finest mountain views in all of Southern Africa, overlooks the beautiful Royal Natal National Park daughter Doreen married William Chalmers, the man who carved a gigantic statue in the Mont-aux-Sources area, from a 9 100 kg rock, 6 m long by 2,5 m high. It depicts a reclining angel, and is called "The Spirit of the Woods". It is still there, and always will be, for to move it would cost a fortune!

Walter Osborn Coventry

Goodoo, the farm Walter Coventry bought, means "Smoking Horn". He bought it for £1 an acre from a Mr van Rooyen, a butcher from Bergville. He had a vague idea of attracting holidaymakers to the area. He put in a Mr W.G. Brighton as tenant.

It was a lonely and isolated spot. The nearest railhead was Ladysmith, 93 km away. The nearest village was a small outpost, called Upper uThukela, on the farm Klein Waterval, 45 km away. In 1900 it was renamed Bergville. The only connection between Goodoo and Bergville was a rough sledge-track. But this did not deter the eager holidaymaker, and soon Goodoo began to receive a thin stream of guests. Brighton used to meet them at Ladysmith with his oxwagon, convey them to Bergville, and then from Bergville to Goodoo by sledge.

The area in those days consisted partly of Native Reserve, partly of farms which had been surveyed and bought, and partly of unoccupied farms that belonged to the State. In 1906 the Honourable W.F. Clayton, Minister of Agriculture and Lands in the Natal Government, took the first step in the establishment of a National Park. A number of farms bordering on Goodoo were surveyed and laid out. They were given names: Vemvaan (Butterfly), Devil's Hoek, Basuto Pass, The Pastures, Diamond (from the shape of the farm), and Dooley, named after the Irish woodcutter. Clayton also arranged for the Natal Government Railways to send a photographic team into the area, consisting of Messrs. Tatlow, Watkinson and Allerston, to publicise it, and this resulted in a fine set of photographs, which for many years adorned the railway carriages of the Natal Government Railways.

In 1908 the territory was explored by Senator Frank Churchill, Colonel (later General) J.S. Wylie, and Colonel Dick, under the guidance of Walter Coventry, and they decided to go ahead, expand the area, and develop the proposed park to its full potential.

But times were bad, and shortly before Union in 1910 the Natal Government decided, because of lack of funds, to abandon the scheme, and sell the land. It was bought by General Wylie, and after Union this public-spirited gentleman sold it back to the Government at cost price on condition that it remained for all time a National Park for the people of South Africa. A new start had been made.

At first accommodation was primitive in the extreme, but in 1913 F.C. Williams, who was leasing Coventry's farm Goodoo at the time, built a small hostel on the site of the Royal Natal National Park Hotel, and more and more people began to come to the area.

In 1916 the Secretary of Lands authorised the reservation of five extra farms and a certain portion of Crown Lands, totalling approximately 3 300 ha. The Natal Provincial Executive Committee then formally took over the park. It was finally proclaimed on 19 September 1916, and an Advisory Committee was appointed to control it. In 1919, the farms Goodoo (486 ha) and Dooley (283 ha) were bought from Coventry together with Basuto Pass, Devil's Hoek, Vemvaan, The Pastures and Diamond. In addition, 1 109 ha of Upper uThukela Trust Land were taken over without alienation from the Native Trust, and this brought the total area of the park to 6 313 ha. Williams' small hostel was enlarged, becoming the first National Park Hostel. It opened officially on 29 June 1919 with 10 guests, and Walter Coventry was installed as the first lessee. The hostel could now take 12 guests.

Mule bus used for conveyance of passengers to the Natal National Park, about 1920 Courtesy Doreen Chalmers

Coventry immediately set to work to establish the park on a sound basis. The first paths were laid out. Prior to 1919 the route to the summit was still the route taken by Dr Matthews in 1870 — up Goodoo Pass, over the nek at Basuto Gate, down into the Free State, and then up the Eland's River to Namahadi Pass and so to the top. One of the first things Coventry did was to engineer a shorter route. From Basuto Gate he struck off left, straight for the Sentinel, instead of going down into the Free State, building the path so well known since then to thousands of tourists. It was ready for use in 1924. In those days the final 150 m to the summit were negotiated via what became known as the Gully, with a spacious cave near the foot in which climbers spent the night. In 1930 the Natal Provincial Administration installed two sensational chain ladders (100 rungs) to surmount the final rock wall, so as to bypass the Gully. This Gully was often rendered impassable in winter through being choked with snow and ice.

In August 1924 Walter Coventry took over the newly created post of Park Superintendent, at the princely salary of £10 a month. Two and a half years later, in November 1926, he resigned his post, after firmly establishing the infant park as one of South Africa's premier tourist attractions.

Those were great days immediately after World War I and in the early 1920s. Walter and his wife gave to the hostel a homely, cheerful air, and did all they could to ease the way of the climber who wished to explore this yet largely unknown area. If you went off for the day, you were not just given a packet of sandwiches and a flask of cold tea. There would always be a party of guides ahead of you, and you would turn a corner of the path in a forest to find a white tablecloth laid out on the ground, gleaming cutlery, and a pot of steaming porridge, smoking bacon and eggs, and a can of boiling coffee awaiting you for breakfast. It was the same for lunch, with cold meat and salads tastefully arranged, again on a white tablecloth. By dusk you were back at the hostel to a roaring fire, and sitting round the huge table with Walter Coventry at one end and his wife at the other. Mrs Coventry was rigorously opposed to any form of liquor, and I am afraid there was a good deal of surreptitious drinking in the barn! If you reported ill, Mrs Coventry would march into your rondavel with a huge medical book under her arm. She would sit down in the chair, give you a searching look, and then proceed to read out a string of symptoms of the most alarming nature, while the patient's hair literally stood on end. But the treatment was always the same: "Open your mouth — wide!" And down would go a big dollop of castor-oil! And everyone, even if it were Lady May Cambridge or Princess Alice, would have to take their turn in the queue for the one and only early morning bath.

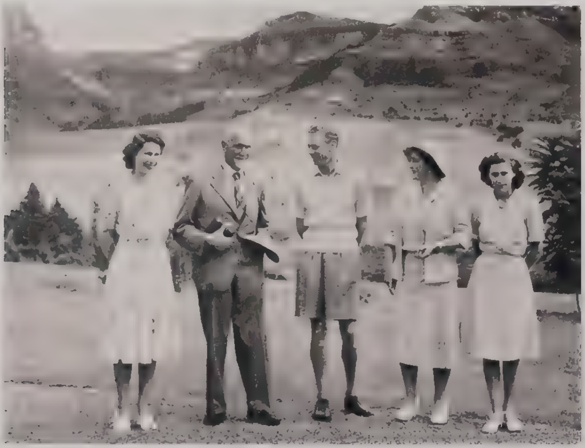
The mule wagon which brought guests to Goodoo Guest Farm approaching the original causeway over the uThukela River, 1925 H.C.B. Wylde-Browne

In the early days roads to the National Park were often impassible Courtesy Anton Zunckel

The main building, old Goodoo house, about 1930 Courtesy Doreen Chalmers

I shall always remember the Coventry guest house in those early days in the 1920s, for it was during January of 1926 that I spent six happy days there, and knew for the first time the lure of those beautiful mountains.

When Walter Coventry resigned in 1926, the hostel was taken over by Otto Zunckel and his son Walter. Otto, with his wonderful personality and understanding of people, made a perfect host, and he gave to his hostel a unique spirit of warm geniality, camaraderie and friendship, while the cooking of his charming wife Mathilda was something to dream about long into the night, after you had left their hospitable roof.



During their strenuous tour of South Africa in 1947, General Jan Smuts arranged for the Royal Family to have a few days rest at the Natal National Park. There was to be no photography and no interviews, but when the King saw Arthur Bowland, who was with the tour officially, hovering nearby with his camera, he said: "All right, Bowland. Just one!" And so this photograph, probably the most memorable of the entire tour, was taken. It shows King George VI and Queen Elizabeth and princesses Elizabeth (left) Margaret (right), with General Smuts Arthur Bowland

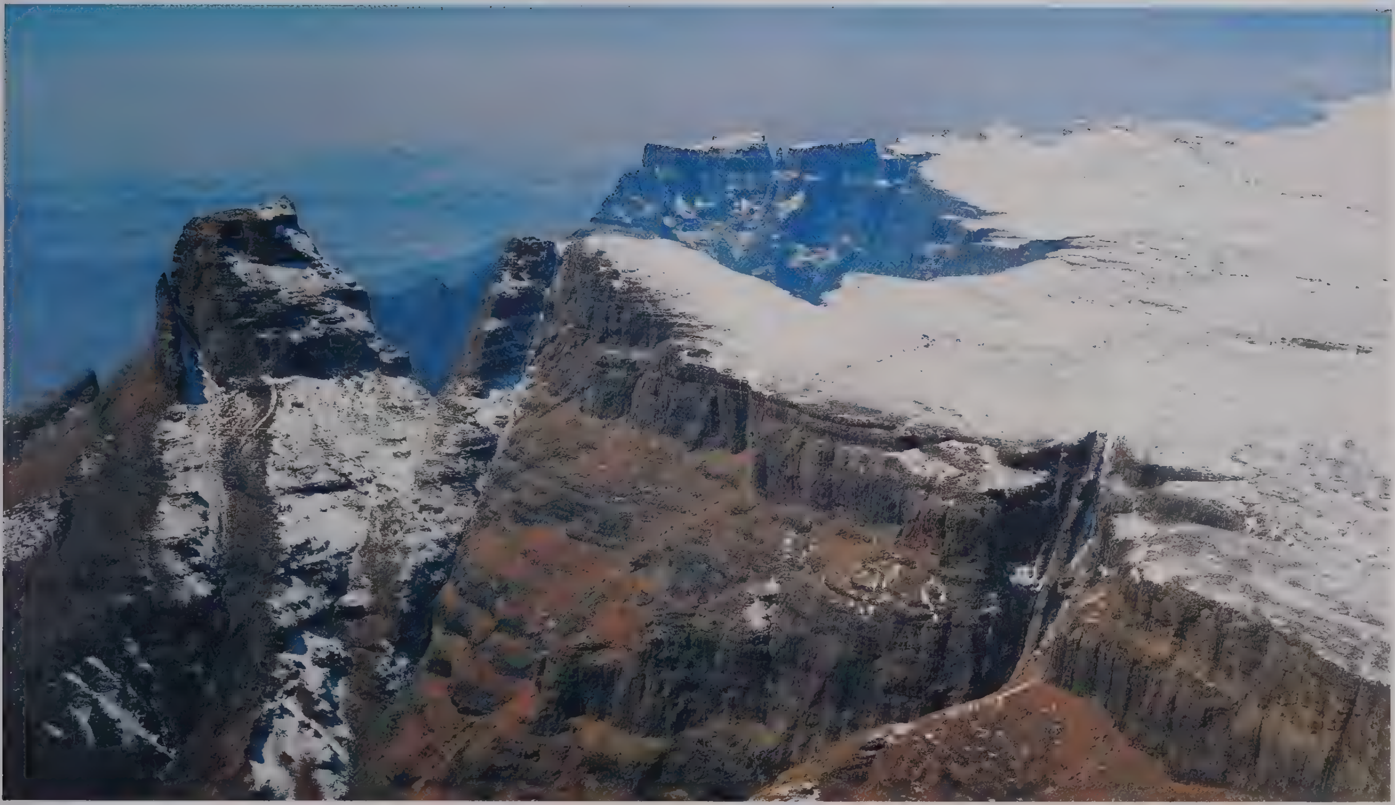
Royal Natal National Park Hotel in 1974 John Hone

On 1 March 1939 Otto and Mathilda retired to their new home at the summit of Oliviershoek Pass, and the hostel was left in the capable hands of their son Walter. But tragedy struck on 10 December 1941, and the hostel was destroyed by a fire caused by an electrical fault. Walter set to with redoubled vigour, and rebuilt it on larger and more spacious lines, and in 1947 it housed for a brief while the British Royal family during their tour of South Africa, thus giving to the park the right to the title Royal Natal National Park.

In the meantime the Advisory Committee, which had been established in 1916, had been abolished in January 1942. For six years the park was administered by the Executive Committee of the Natal Provincial Council, until the formation of the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board in December 1947.

In August 1946 Peter Pope-Ellis, the well-known cricketer, was appointed the first full-time warden of the park. Periodically, too, over the years, the boundaries of the park were enlarged. In 1950 two farms, Rugged Glen and Ungiyeza, were purchased, bringing the area up to its present 8 094 ha.

Today the park, with its hutted camp at Thendele, its caravan park, and its well-posted paths, is one of the finest holiday resorts in South Africa. But the hotel has gone. The buildings were showing their age and it was clear that a huge refurbishment was necessary to bring it in line with other, more modern hotels in the Drakensberg. The last lessees were Linda and Andy Capp, who took it over in 1980. After Andy's death, Linda did not renew the lease, and the hotel closed in April 2000. A tender for its redevelopment was accepted by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (formerly Natal Parks Board), but after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, funding from the United States for the project was withdrawn.



The Sentinel (left) and the Amphitheatre plateau John Hone

At the time of the revision of this book (January 2006), the hotel buildings stand in ruins, and a feasibility study, initiated by EKZN Wildlife, was looking into the target market and the type of facility that would replace the old hotel. State money — from the Extended Public Works Programme, sourced by EKZN Wildlife as part of its poverty relief contribution — was available for the project. According to an EKZN Wildlife spokesman, how the hotel would be managed was still to be decided, but it would probably be leased, with certain provisos. These included a strong community equity in the business and strict conditions in terms of rules for employment and capacity building of local people.

If the feasibility study proves that a new hotel is not viable, then most of the present structures would be demolished, keeping only those required for management purposes, possibly including a permanent research station.

The valleys in the park are richly wooded with yellowwoods, Cape chestnuts and black ironwoods; countless streams and waterfalls pour down the mountainsides and flash in the sun; while the wild flowers make of these lovely valleys and green slopes a botanist's paradise. The bushbuck, the grey rhebok, the baboons and the rock rabbits live here in peace, and the black eagle and the mighty lammergeier circle the skies in lordly indifference.

Over it all tower the great peaks.

The Amphitheatre is easily the most spectacular of them. This is a huge mountain wall, slightly curved, 4 km in length, and 1 500 m high, its precipitous sides sculptured into a fantastic maze of towers, minarets and spires, and deeply etched chasms and gorges.

Here is the birthplace of the uThukela River, one of the great rivers of South Africa. Its very name, which in Zulu means “startling”, has been woven into the warp and woof of our history. Known to shipwrecked Portuguese sailors, closely connected with the rise and fall of the Zulu nation, discovered by French explorers, forded by the hardy Voortrekkers, harnessed by colonising Englishmen, kingpin today of the mighty uThukela-Vaal Water Development Scheme, and with battle honours dating from the Anglo-Boer War, it rises on the summit of Mont-aux-Sources itself, some 2 or 3 km inland from the edge of the escarpment. For a short distance it ripples over the great plain, and then suddenly, it plunges over the mighty wall of the Amphitheatre. In summer, after a Drakensberg storm, the roar of its thunder can be heard from away down the valley, but in winter its voice is stilled, for the bitter cold of the heights seizes and holds it, and it freezes solid.

The height of the falls is a matter of considerable controversy. Estimates over the years have varied from 620 to 950 m. The latest figure put forward is 855 m.

After its dizzy plunge, it gathers momentum, thunders its way through the gorge at the bottom, until it breaks out into the open plains, and starts on its long journey to the distant sea.

The summit of the Amphitheatre is easily reached from the north-western, Free State, side via the well-known bridle path (now a motor road) and the chain ladder. The frontal face is another matter — a sheer mountain wall. Many attempts were made over the years to scale its terrifying precipices. George Londt and Frank Berrisford attempted to climb it in July 1922, but were forced back as the precipices were too heavily iced up. It was not until April 1935 that it was finally climbed. On Good Friday, 19 April, Doyle Liebenberg led a strong party consisting of Mark Frank, Aimee Netter and Mary Lear to the summit. Four years passed before the second ascent was made. On 19 January 1939, Dr A.H. Park-Ross, Walter Zunckel and Mungo Park-Ross scaled the wall for the second time. It was “P-R’s” sixtieth birthday.

This summit is a vast plateau, called by the Basotho Pofung (Empofeni) or the Place of the Eland. Three kilometres inland from the edge of the escarpment is Mont-aux-Sources itself, 3 282 m high, where Arbousset and Daumas had stood in 1836, and where KwaZulu-Natal, Lesotho and QwaQwa meet. Here three great river systems have their sources. These are the KhubeduKhubelu complex (the Orange River system), the uThukela Head streams (three in number) and the Eland (Namahadi), which runs into the Wilge and thence into the Vaal.

A remarkable example of river capture is to be seen here. Originally the Eastern Khubedu flowed in a wide curve from Mont-aux-Sources down into Lesotho, but with the gradual east-ward retreat of the escarpment, this curve was cut, resulting in the river flowing down the escarpment and into KwaZulu-Natal, instead of through Lesotho.

Opening of the Natal Mountain Club hut by Mrs Botha-Reid (in doorway) Mont-aux-Sources, 19 April 1930 MCSA Archives

The men remain behind talking, while the ladies retire early to the 'Ladies Quarters' on the occasion of the opening of the hut

MCSA Archives

Here, too, on the summit, used to be the old, greatly loved Natal Mountain Club hut, a haven of refuge in the early days for climbers from all over the country. It was built by Otto Zunckel and his son, Walter, in 1930. All the material, other than the stone, had to be carried up over 21 km of mountain paths and a vertical distance of 1 850 m.

The hut was officially opened during Easter of 1930. Climbers came from far and near for the ceremony. Of course "Oompie" Liddle was there, motoring all the way from Kimberley. Mrs Botha-Reid was asked to open the hut, a gracious tribute to the wife of the "father" of the Natal Mountain Club. That night they held a magnificent party in the hut, and next day they "christened" Mount Amery, 4,25 km away. Hubert Botha-Reid performed the ceremony this time, using a bottle of petrol, as all the champagne had disappeared at the party the night before!

The subsequent history of the hut is a sad one. Originally it was beautifully equipped with wooden tables, bunks, comfortable mattresses, blankets and pressure stoves. It was vandalised until it was no more than an empty shell, without even windows or doors. It became virtually impossible to prevent its contents being plundered by the Basotho, and a subsequent dispute of the ownership of the land on which it stood led eventually to its total neglect. Late in 1986, however, the Natal Parks Board renovated the hut as an outstation to accommodate game guards. Guards were stationed there to curtail theft from hikers, but they were withdrawn in 2004. When they left local tribesmen again smashed down the door to plunder the hut and remove cupboards and other items.

Before the construction of the new mountain road from Witsieshoek to the base of the Sentinel there were few lonelier spots on earth than the Plains of the Pofung. But in 1866 they were invaded, quite literally, by an army. During the Basuto War of that year Commandant Visser, with 546 burghers and 61 black scouts, ascended to the plateau and camped there for a brief while. In 1917 a Police Post was established not far from the eventual site of the Mountain Club hut, and manned by a detachment of the Basutoland Mounted Police. But it was so isolated and lonely, and the altitude so great (it was the highest inhabited spot in South Africa, probably in the whole of Africa) that eventually it had to be abandoned.

Such, then, is Pofung, the Place of the Eland.

"Here," said one who visited it in the early 1890s, "the air is filled with all the mystery, the loneliness, and the beauty of Africa."

Immediately to the south of the Amphitheatre is Mount Amery, and here the wall of the Drakensberg is a little easier. It drops down into the valley of the ubuSingatha, which means "Dancing Water", and this section is sometimes called ubuSingatha Wall. It was this wall that Colonel Amery descended in 1900. His claim, in later years, to have descended the Amphitheatre Wall can hardly be substantiated, for this can only be done by expert mountaineers equipped with rope. The ubuSingatha Wall was climbed for the first time by D.W. Bassett-Smith and probably R.G. Kingdon, round about 1920. Mount Amery frontal (a new route) was first climbed in September 1955 by Robert and Malcolm Moor and Martin Winter. I had had the pleasure of introducing the Moor brothers to Drakensberg climbing a few years previously while they were still schoolboys.

To the north of the uThukela Falls, but still part of the escarpment, is Beacon Buttress. It derives its name from the beacon on its summit. From this point on a clear day portions of three provinces of South Africa — KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Free State — can be seen, as well as Lesotho.

North-east of Beacon Buttress is the Sentinel, one of the grandest of all Drakensberg peaks, and the first major peak to be climbed. When, why, and by whom it was first called the Sentinel is not known. In 1905 it had not been named at all. In 1910 it was called by two names, North-east Tower and Sentinel Peak. As late as 1914 it was still being called North-east Tower. Its Zulu name is Ntabamnyama, the Black One. The

The western face of Sentinel Peak

Malcolm Pearse

previous chapter has described how it was first climbed by W.J. Wybergh and Lieutenant N.M. McLeod in September 1910.

The western face of the mountain, which faces the chain ladder, is fairly easily climbed, with only two pitches that require rope. Several other routes, however, of a much higher standard, have been opened up since the first ascents were made. On 17 February 1959 Pam and Peter Angus-Leppan pioneered a route up the north face. As one fronts the peak from the bridle path below the Witches, one notices a long crack, slightly to the right of the highest point, running diagonally down from right to left. At the commencement of the crack is a small gendarme. It was up this crack that Pam and her husband made their climb.

In 1969 Roger Fuggle and Tony Dick made the first ascent of the extremely difficult south-eastern arête of the peak (the ridge facing the present Royal Natal National Park Hotel). The following year Roger[1] was joined by C. Shuttleworth in conquering the north-eastern face — the side of the mountain visible from the Sentinel carpark.

Next to the Sentinel, and high above the bridle path, are the Witches. Prior to 1917 they were called the Three Fingers.

The southern bastion of the Amphitheatre is a little more complicated than the northern. Working from the outside in, towards the main escarpment, we have, first, the Eastern Buttress, sometimes called the Outer Tower. It was originally called South-west Tower. Then comes the fearful-looking Devil's Tooth, a thin, narrow spire about 50 m lower than the Eastern Buttress, but with 200 m of sheer and apparently unclimbable sides. Beyond Devil's Tooth and next to the escarpment, is Inner Tower. At one time it was thought that there were two of these Towers, and they were called the Middle and the Inner Towers. In 1945, however, Stan Rose, Elizabeth Burton, and Hans Wongchowski proved definitely that there is no Middle Tower, but only one block of basalt, with three summit plateaux separated from each other by narrow gaps about

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[1] In July 1974 Roger Fuggle was struck by an avalanche and killed while climbing in the French Alps.

15 to 20 m in depth. They ascended all three summits. The term Middle Tower has now been abandoned, and this huge block of solid basalt is called Inner Tower. We have already told, in the previous chapter, the story of the first ascent of Eastern Buttress and Inner Tower.

The story of the conquest of Devil's Tooth is as dramatic as any in the climbing history of the Drakensberg. From the very earliest days it had captured the imagination of veteran climbers, but so stupendous were its towering cliffs, and so smooth, that few thought it would ever be climbed. It was given the name it bears today round about 1920, but by whom is not known. Prior to this it was called Cleopatra's Needle. Tom Casement, Father Kelly and G.J. Miller all had a look at it, and pronounced it quite unclimbable. They did not even attempt it.

In August 1950 the Devil's Tooth, last of the Drakensberg's 'prize' free standing peaks, was conquered by Peter Campbell, Ted Scholes and David Bel. Circled are two of the climbers Des Watkins

By 1947 it had still not been climbed. Starkly it stood there, soaring up into the clouds, the last major unclimbed peak in the Drakensberg, possibly in the whole of South Africa. Monk's Cowl, Column, the Bell, the Western Injisuthi Triplet, all had been conquered. Devil's Tooth still stood unclimbed, proud and inviolate. It was a challenge few mountaineers could resist.

The first serious attempt on it was made in 1947. In that year Tobie Louw and Bill Curle set out, determined to be the first to breach its lonely summit. They had to turn back almost at the very foot of the peak. So sheer and smooth were the rock faces that it was almost impossible even to get on to the peak.

A month later Jannie Graaff and Tom Bright tackled it. It took them three hours and several pitons to make a traverse of 25 m. This only brought them to the base of the pinnacle. They returned the following day, but again had to admit defeat. It was after this attempt that Graaff gave it as his opinion that only a team of dental mechanics would ever be able to extract the Tooth!

Three more unsuccessful attempts followed, and then, in August 1950, one of the strongest teams ever to be assembled in the Drakensberg gathered at the National Park Hotel. It consisted of Des Watkins and his wife Jean, Charles Gloster, Barry Anderson, Ted Scholes, David Bell, Peter Campbell and Willie Politzer, all expert cragsmen. Half of these were Natal climbers and half from the Transvaal.

An aerial view of Devil's Tooth Malcolm Pearse

They set off from the hotel at 10 am on Saturday, 5 August 1950, making their way up the uThukela River, into uThukela Gorge, and then striking left up Devil's Tooth Gully. As they penetrated closer in to the Amphitheatre Wall, spire after spire, minaret upon minaret closed in around them, a maze of turrets and towers ending in the tremendous wall of the Amphitheatre itself. The climb up the Gully from the Gorge, to the base of the peak, is close on 1 200 m, and as they climbed the whole vast panorama of the Amphitheatre, from Sentinel Peak to Eastern Buttress, opened out before them.

Several years prior to this, during one of the abortive attempts on the peak, Bob Davies had discovered a cave underneath the Tooth, dry, well sheltered, and capable of accommodating eight to 10 people. It is about 250 m below the nek connecting the Tooth to the Eastern Buttress, 30 m above the point where Devil's Tooth Gully divides on either side of the Tooth, on the Eastern Buttress slopes. They decided to use this cave as their base.

By late afternoon they had reached it, and were soon settled in. Before having their supper they sat at the entrance of their cave, looking straight across to the magnificent pinnacle towering above them, which they hoped to conquer, outlined starkly against a deep blue sky. The sun was just setting, and the peak glowed richly against the intense blue of the sky, "godlike in its appalling sheerness and utter impossibility", as one of them wrote afterwards. They wondered what the morrow held for them.

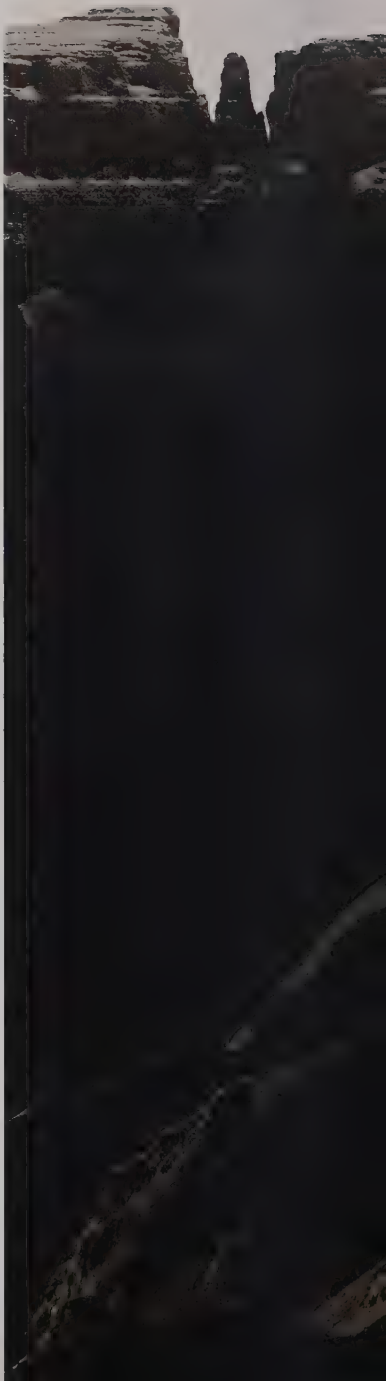
Next morning they were awake early. A stiff scramble up the left-hand gully, involving two short D pitches, and a grass traverse clockwise round the back of the Tooth, and to the front again, brought them out on to the west face, where it abutted on the Inner Tower. From this point climbing was to commence. It was 9.30 am.

Previous attempts on the peak had established the fact that the only feasible route was on the side facing the uThukela, starting in the nek between the Tooth and the Inner Tower, and veering left towards the north-eastern face. The whole base was surrounded by a 30 m high barrier of overhanging rock with only one break in it, a rotten, bulging face leading up to an even more difficult recess. It was this face that had beaten all previous climbing parties.

It was decided that David Bell, Peter Campbell and Ted Scholes would do the actual climb. The rest of the party remained below as a support group, to be brought up later: three men climb much more quickly than eight.

David Bell led, and two pitches of E and F standard brought them to the foot of the bulging face which led to the recess. Here Ted Scholes took over, and belayed by two ropes he worked his way up until he was baffled by an unclimbable overhang just below the recess. Standing in a most precarious position, he made a supreme effort, and managed to hammer in a piton on the face above the overhang. To this he clipped a karabiner and one rope, and retired, exhausted. The manoeuvre had taken it out of him more than he cared to admit, and the other two insisted that he take a long rest. He was "out" of the climb for the next hour.

Now David Bell took over again. He climbed as far as the piton, but even with the help of this piton he found it quite impossible to surmount the bulge. It was 2 m high, absolutely smooth, and it had to



Phantom Waterfall'. Cold early morning mists flow over the rugged walls of the Amphitheatre Malcolm Pearse

be surmounted if the recess, the only way through the overhangs to the summit, was to be reached.

David first of all managed to hammer in another piton, 30 cm below the previous one, through which he passed a short sling. Now came a piece of really tricky climbing. The sling was hanging down from the lip of the overhang, and about 30 cm from the rock face. Standing precariously on nothing more than a small friction hold with his left foot, David was able to lift his right foot almost shoulder high, and to place it in the sling, and then, with a terrific effort, hoist himself up. His free left foot found a small bump on the smooth upper face of the bulge, and then, a grab at a small grass tuft, a mighty push-off with his right foot from the sling, and a slight friction hold with his right hand, and he was up and over. It was a manoeuvre that would have taxed the strength and skill of the most expert gymnast. Once into the base of the recess, David made a piton belay, and brought up Peter Campbell.

But the recess itself was horribly smooth and sheer. High above were more overhangs. Peter now took over. Standing on David's shoulders he managed to get started up the recess. He reached a crack, into which he hammered a piton for a running belay, and attempted to climb on, but failed. He had to return after accomplishing nothing more than the piton.

David now took the lead again, to give Peter a chance to recover his strength. He reached the piton, and using this as a handhold, he swung left across and into the recess. Here he found a handhold, and drove in another piton. "Holding on at this point," he says, "was not funny, but I managed to get about four feet up the crack, and knocked in another rather insecure piton." Belaying himself from this, he went down and joined Peter. Ted Scholes was still recovering his strength, far below him.

Peter, now rested, went up. He reached the last piton, and with a tremendous effort, surmounted an awkward projecting block, and reached the top of the recess.

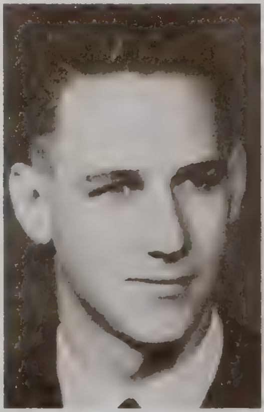
And now a cheer went up from the support party far below, who had been breathlessly watching the three men climb. They had spent the last two or three hours sending up, at intervals, relays of tea and dried fruit by a light line to the exhausted men above.

Peter now brought David and Ted up. Ted was now well rested after his heroic effort at the bulge. All three were now at the top of the recess. It was 3 pm. They had taken five hours to climb 50 m. Above them still loomed a further 100 m of unknown and frightening rock. The possibility of being benighted on the Tooth was too dreadful to contemplate, so it was decided that the three men would press on alone, as fast as possible, in an attempt to reach the summit and descend before sunset, which would be about 5.30 pm. They dared not wait to be joined by the remainder of the party, still waiting below at the foot of the rock.

By now the exposure was appalling, and they were tired. Stupendous precipices still towered menacingly above them. Ted started off to explore the next pitch. He climbed swiftly. A very exposed E pitch brought him to the foot of a chimney. He quickly surmounted this, and then, to his indescribable relief, he found the upper defences had been penetrated. The last pitch was surprisingly easy after their grim battles lower down, and by 4 pm all three were at the top.

They built the usual cairn of stones. The summit was a bare 3 m square, just room for the three men to stand on. They decorated the cairn with the tattered remains of Peter's pyjamas, which he had insisted on wearing underneath his shorts for additional warmth. Then they abseiled down, reaching the bottom about sunset.

Drakensberg rock is very different from the rock of the Cape mountains. It is dangerously friable, and breaks away easily. I knew a well-known climber once who had climbed in the Himalayas and who refused to climb in the Drakensberg. He had too much respect for his neck, he said! It is surprising, therefore, that there have been so few accidents in our Drakensberg mountains. In fact, the only one I know of in the Mont-aux-Sources area, due to a rock breaking away, was the tragic death of Ross Osborn in 1953.


Ross Osborn

Ross was a second-year law student at Natal University in Durban. He was a fine student, keen athlete, a member of the SRC, of which he had been secretary the previous year, and a potential Rhodes Scholar. He and a friend, Stewart Ferguson, also of Durban, set out to climb the Amphitheatre on Wednesday, 25 November 1953. They reached the hut about noon, and then decided to come down via the Inner

Tower Ravine. They obviously did not know the pass and went down a dangerous gully, the route almost certainly taken by Dr Matthews in 1870, some way before the Inner Tower Ravine. Halfway down they encountered a high waterfall, with steep rock faces on each side. This could easily have been the same waterfall that Dr Matthews had encountered. After several attempts at circumventing this, they gave up, and decided to climb back up, with Ferguson leading. Ferguson reached the top, turned round, and was horrified to see a rock which Ross had grasped, breaking away, and Ross falling backwards into space.

It was impossible for Ferguson to reach the body — he could see it wedged among some rocks far below — but Ross was obviously dead and there was nothing he could do. He raced back to the hut, where he found two married couples. One of them, a Mr de Wit of Pretoria, offered to go for help. It was now dusk, but he set off immediately, heading for the chain ladder. Throughout the early hours of the night he made his way down the mountainside, arriving at the hotel at 11.15 pm. The alarm was raised. G.L. Harkins, manager of the hotel, organised a rescue party of 10, including Bill Barnes, Peter Pope-Ellis, Pip Adelson, Nick Kaltenbrun and Arthur Cross, while a priority telephone call was put through to Martin Winter at Frere, asking him to come over and head the rescue operation. Martin set out at midnight, and arrived in time to join the rescue party which set off on horseback at 4 am.

They rode up Goodoo Valley to Basuto Gate, and then up the bridle path to the chain ladder. Here they left their horses and made their way on foot up the ladder and along the plateau to the hut, which they reached at 8.30 am. Ferguson was waiting for them and together they went on another 3 km to the head of the gully down which they had attempted to climb. After a short search they sighted the body halfway down. Three of the men, Martin Winter, who led the group, Bill Barnes and Pip Adelson, then commenced the descent. Almost from the start they had to use rope. About midday they reached the body, and then the really difficult part of the operation commenced. Using their rope they had to lower the body down precipitous rock faces, abseiling down themselves afterwards. It was a perilous and exhausting job, and even at the bottom of the ravine their troubles were not over, for they still had to make their way down to the uThukela Gorge through some of the roughest country in the Drakensberg. Here, however, they met a party of black game rangers who had been sent up the uThukela valley from the hotel as a support group. Almost at the end of their tether (they had not slept at all the previous night) they stumbled and fought their way down the precipitous slopes, choked with bush and scrub, until, just as dusk was setting in, they reached Tunnel Cave.

In the meantime a new force of helpers arrived, and this group was able to get Ross Osborn's body down to the hotel late that night. The three men who had recovered the body spent the night in the cave, and only reached the hotel the following day.

Perhaps the worst tragedy, and the most complex rescue operation ever to be mounted in the Drakensberg, was that of 29 April to 4 May 1959.

On Wednesday, 29 April, a party of 15 College of Education students from Johannesburg left the hotel for a light-hearted trip to the summit of the Amphitheatre. It was a clear morning, but the warden of the park, Joe Stanton, warned them that the Weather Bureau had forecast a cold front moving up from the Cape, and that heavy snow could be expected on the Drakensberg that night. He advised them not to go, or at the very least to take plenty of warm clothing with them. They ignored the warning. They proceeded up the usual bridle path to Basuto Gate in high spirits, and then up the long haul to the Witches and Sentinel Peak. In the late afternoon, however, the sudden change in the weather, which had been foretold, occurred. Black and ominous clouds began to sweep over the peaks, thunder growled, and the wind howled eerily among the crags. Soon it began to rain, and the temperature plummeted to almost zero.

By this time the party was strung out along the bridle path between Sentinel Peak and the chain ladder, a distance of about 1,5 km. Those in front made a dash for the chain ladder, which led to the summit plateau. But before they reached it, a blizzard swept down on them and heavy snow began to fall. Most of them managed to surmount the ladder, and, once on top, made a dash for the Mountain Club hut. This is a trek of 1,5 km. When they reached it they were at the end of their tether.

But darkness had now fallen, and a small group of students, including Keith Erasmus and two girls, Cynthia Bennett and Joy Jansen, both 19 years old, were unable to reach the ladder in time. They found themselves left behind, in pitch darkness, in sub-zero temperatures and a howling blizzard.

In the meantime another party was approaching the hut from the opposite direction. Arthur Bowland, well-known Natal Mercury photographer, Dorothy Rees, and a Mercury reporter, Miles Mattson,

Malcolm Pearse

Beautiful ... and dangerous!

The snowy summit plateau of the Amphitheatre, with the uThukela River and, in the background, the Eastern Buttress. It's a picture postcard scene, but one fraught with danger for the poorly equipped and the inexperienced had been spending a few days at Oxbow, 35 km away in Lesotho, with Dick Reed, the Basutoland Government's Meteorological Officer at Oxbow. Together with Reed, they had ridden over to the Mountain Club hut on this same day. They arrived just after the first batch of students.

As soon as Reed heard that a small group had been left behind, below the chain ladder, he immediately took command of the situation. He set off with three of the men, Brian Kerr, Peter Christensen and John Edgerton, in thick mist, carrying food and warm clothing for the party stranded below. They reached the chain ladder, and, whipped by driving rain and snow, reached the bottom. Here they found the two girls, Cynthia Bennett and Joy Jansen, in a state of collapse. Reed said afterwards that they could not have survived another hour.

They managed to get the two girls into the cave, not far from the Gully, which used to be the old route to the top before the chain ladder was built. But the girls were now in a coma, and the situation was desperate, for, in addition to their other troubles, Keith Erasmus was missing. Reed decided to go back for further help, leaving Kerr, Christensen and Edgerton to care for the girls.

By now the ladder had begun to ice up. In a fierce gale and driving snow, Reed made a nightmare ascent of the ladder. Near the top he missed his footing on the slippery ice. Telling the story later, Reed described how, by a sheer miracle, his boot had caught in a rung of the ladder, and this had saved him from plunging to the bottom. For a moment he hung upside down, and then with a tremendous effort he seized another rung, regained the ladder, and reached the top. Arrived there he raced for the hut, but in the mist and driving snow he lost his way, and it was some time before he reached the others in the only shelter on that icy, snowdriven plateau.

Meantime, what had happened to Keith Erasmus? He had been almost the last of the long string of climbers on the bridle path, and was badly affected by the altitude and the cold. By the time he had reached the base of the Sentinel, the blizzard was upon him, darkness had fallen, and he was in a state of complete mental and physical collapse. One of the girls in the party remained behind with him on the path until he was incapable of moving any further, and then she went for help. She had nothing to cover him with. Exhausted herself, and clothed only in a thin silk shirt and shorts, she set off as fast as she could for the chain ladder.

Away up in the cave, 30 m above the path, the girls had now been made as comfortable as possible, and Peter Christensen decided to go and look for Keith Erasmus. Back along the path he went, and then, huddled up against a rock and unconscious, he found Keith. Nearby was his rucksack and ice-axe, both coated with ice. His clothing was stiff with ice. Covering him in his own lumberjacket, he sped back to the cave. Here he told Brian Kerr and Edgerton that he had found Keith, and was going on up the chain ladder for help. The two men accompanied him to the foot of the ladder and saw him up the first few rungs, from where he disappeared into the mist above. He was never seen alive again.

Reed was now back at the hut, and soon the girl who had remained behind with Keith Erasmus staggered in with the news of Keith's serious plight. Again a rescue party set out, a strong one this time, consisting of Reed, Arthur Bowland, Miles Mattson, Tom Edgerton, Neville Davis, Mike Brown and George Tempest. But they never even made the chain ladder. On that bitter, mist-enshrouded, windswept plateau, lashed by driving rain and whirling snow, they completely lost their way[1]. They wandered helplessly around for several hours, crossing iced-up streams and plunging into deep snow-drifts, before finding their way back to the hut. Several times they heard faint cries in the night, but could not locate the direction of the sound. They must have come from Peter Christensen.

When they arrived back at the hut Dick Reed was determined to go out again in search of Erasmus, and to take more blankets and food to the party in the cave. He took with him three students — Jan van der Merwe, George Tempest and John Vorster — and negotiated the treacherous iced chain ladder and reached the cave. Had they not succeeded there is little doubt that those in the cave would have perished.

By next morning, Thursday, it had stopped snowing, but heavy cloud blanketed the area, and it was blowing big guns. What seemed at first to be merely a local storm was obviously something much bigger and more widespread, almost certainly a cyclone from the South Pole. But

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[1] After this tragedy the authorities erected a single strand of wire leading from the chain ladder to the hut, to guide people along the summit in bad weather. If it had been in place before this tragedy, Christensen would not have lost his life. This wire, however, was not long in place before being stolen.

The Mountain Club hut on the Amphitheatre Malcolm Pearse

they were able to take stock of their position. The party was now intact, except for Keith Erasmus and Peter Christensen, whom they assumed were with Dick Reed, the two girls and the other students in the cave down below. When contact was made, it was established that Christensen and Erasmus were missing. Keith Erasmus had been left on the path between Sentinel Peak and the chain ladder. It was doubtful whether he could have survived the sub-zero temperatures of the previous night in the thin clothes he was wearing. Christensen was last seen alive going up the chain ladder. An urgent message was sent down to the warden of the park, Joe Stanton. Rescue operations swung swiftly into action.

For the first time in Drakensberg climbing history walkie-talkies were used, and also a helicopter, piloted by Captain Scott of Johannesburg. Martin Winter was again alerted, and asked to take charge of the rescue operations. Crack climbers from Durban, Maritzburg and Estcourt converged on the site, together with Natal Parks Board officials, black game rangers, a doctor, and police from both Natal and Witsieshoek. Even Basotho chiefs from adjoining areas in Lesotho offered help, and sent contingents of their men. By Thursday evening 29 experienced mountaineers had gathered at the hotel or were on their way up. They were equipped with ropes, climbing gear and walkie-talkie radio sets. A complicated organisation for supplying them with food was set up.

While the search for the two missing men went on, the party of students was being evacuated to the base, a long and wearisome process, for by now the chain ladder was completely iced up and considered far too dangerous, and they had to use the much longer and time-consuming Gully. (This Gully dips off the summit from a point almost at the top of Beacon Buttress. It is a long walk, and a stiff climb, from the hut to the lip of the Gully.) Then the rescue and search parties took over the hut.

Conditions on the summit now grew steadily worse. The uThukela River was frozen over and heavy snow and mist blanketed the area. Though any chance of the two missing men being found alive was by now almost nil, the rescue teams continued their search throughout the day. That night the weather cleared, and Friday dawned with the sun shining on the vast snowfields.

It was not long before the body of Keith Erasmus was found. He had

The search lasted months with helpers making use of both the mountain hut and camping out Arthur Bowland fallen over a 20 m cliff, not far from his abandoned rucksack and ice-axe. But of Peter Christensen there was no sign. He had simply disappeared into that frozen night. He might have fallen over, or been blown over the edge of the escarpment, and his body might have become wedged in some impossible chasm, in which it would never be found. He might have wandered off into Lesotho. He might have simply died of exposure on that terrible night. Or he might, miraculously, have survived under some sheltering rocks, though few thought this was possible. Throughout Friday and Saturday the search went on. Both those days were clear, and the helicopter was used to good purpose, criss-crossing the bewildering maze of jagged spires and ice-encrusted chasms.

On Sunday there was another fall of snow, and on Monday it was again snowing hard. All hope of finding Christensen alive had now faded, and it was decided to abandon the search for the time being.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
WALDEMAR PETER
CHRISTENSEN
WHO FELL ASLEEP HERE
APRIL
AGED
YEARS.

The commemorative plaque to Waldemar Peter Christensen on the summit of the Amphitheatre

R.O. Pearse

Peter Christensen lost his way in a snowstorm on this summit and wandered around in the dark in a vain attempt to reach the safety of the mountain hut. His body was eventually found near the edge above the shadowed cliffs in the background

The winter of 1959 was a hard one. For many months the snow lay thick on the ground, choking up the gullies and filling the deep clefts in the rock faces. It was not until a little over two months later, on 5 July, when the snow finally began to melt, that Christensen's body was found. A.D. Terblanche, agricultural supervisor at Witsieshoek, found the body on the summit plateau, about 600 m from the Mountain Club hut. It was obvious that he had climbed the chain ladder on that fatal night, and in trying to find the hut in the mist and darkness, had passed it, become lost, and wandered on helplessly until death had claimed him.

He had given his life for his friend. On that grim night two months before, thinking not of himself, he had covered Keith Erasmus with his own lumberjacket, and had thereby surrendered his only hope of survival[1].

On the spot where his body was found, a simple slab was let into a block of Drakensberg basalt[2]. The inscription reads:

In loving memory of Waldemar Peter
Christensen, who fell asleep here,
29th April, 1959, aged 23 years.

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[1] This tragic episode emphasises the prime importance, indeed the absolute necessity, of always keeping the party together when climbing in the Drakensberg. Speed must be governed by the ability of the slowest member of the party. The leader should never allow the party to scatter. He should place the next strongest and most experienced man he has in the rear, and he should keep in constant contact with him, by calling to him periodically if necessary. This is not the only fatal accident that has been caused in the Drakensberg through stragglers getting left behind in the dark and then becoming lost.

[2] It has been vandalised, and all that remains is the cement base where it once stood.

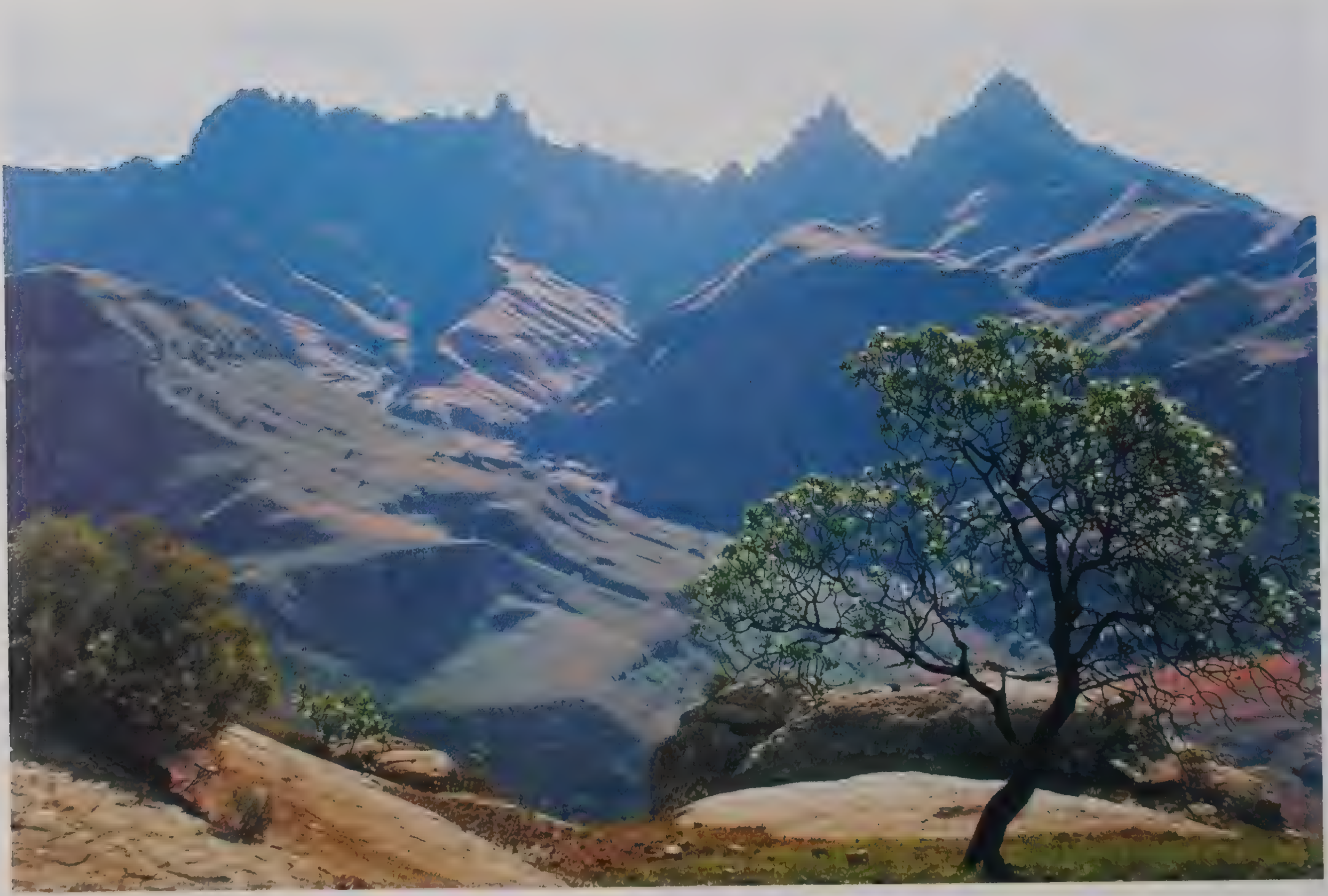
The valley of the Ntonjelana, viewed from the vicinity of uMponjwana Cave

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 10

THE LOVELY MNWENI

Red road winding, winding up the valley,
Blue hills calling in the cool of eventide.
Anonymous



The Rockeries, uMponjwana and the Mnweni Needles dominate the Ntonjelan' eshonalanga valley

Malcolm Pearse

In the early days one travelled along the old road from Bergville that used to lead to the Royal Natal National Park, and through the black settlement of Rookdale, a few kilometres after leaving Bergville. On your left was a broad valley, and beyond, the towering peaks of the Drakensberg. Opposite the Rookdale Mission Station was an insignificant little road, leading into this valley. You could easily miss it. For a short while it meandered through dusty mealie fields, and then it dipped down into the Mnweni and crossed the river. From there it headed up into one of the fairest valleys that I know of in the whole length of the Drakensberg.

This beautiful valley is the valley of the Mnweni. Here you found no hotels, no caravan parks, no tarred roads, in fact no roads at all, once you reached the end of the winding red road leading into it. Down in the valleys lived the remnants of the amaZizi and the amaNgwane, survivors of the wars of Shaka, but in the upper reaches, and underneath the great peaks, there was no one. You could walk for days on end and never meet another human soul. You had to be entirely self-sufficient as regards food and bedding, and the only sounds were the cry of the black eagle, and the rippling of the mountain streams[1].

For this is a land of rivers — the great Mnweni itself, rising in the Mnweni Cutback behind uMponjwana; the Setene, flowing out from under Mount Oompie; the Ifidi, remote yet beckoning; the amaNzana; and the two Ntonjelanas, Ntonjelan' ephumalanga and Ntonjelan' eshonalanga. The very name Ntonjelana means "oozing of water". Never are you out of the sound of their cool waters.

uMponjwana Peak Malcolm Pearse

Here you will find some of the grandest peaks in the whole of the Drakensberg. uMponjwana, once known as Rockeries Tower, mightiest of them all, dominates the area. This is the peak climbed by George Thomson and Kenneth Snelson in 1946. Behind it is uMponjwana Cave, known to hundreds of mountaineers down the years. Close by are the Rockeries with its numerous spires looming above the pass of the same name. In front are the Inner and Outer Mnweni Needles, and to the west, tucked against the background, are the two magnificent Mnweni Pinnacles. To the north and south stretches a line of seemingly never-ending, impressive peaks — the Black and Tan Wall, uMbundini and the Ifidi Buttress, the Saddle and the Cathedral Range. And here, too, you will find those shy and secret valleys, far from the haunts of man, the valleys of the Setene, the uMbundini, the Icidi, and of the two Ntonjelanas.

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[1] Intrusion into the Mnweni was, regrettably, inevitable, and since Reg Pearse wrote about the Mnweni there has been development on the mountain side of the Ntonjelana river. (The Ntonjelana joins the Mnweni just beyond Moliva's Store). A rough causeway crosses the Ntonjelana, and about 200 m further on is a "cultural centre". Bergwatch and the Wildlife Society (WESSA) were involved in its creation, together with Rand Water and regional and tourist bodies who provided the finance. Bergwatch strongly urged the centre to be placed on the site of Moliva's store, but lost the debate.

Between the Isandlwana Police Station (7 km back and from where hikes used to start) many roads have gone in, and there is a new bridge across the Mnweni, not far from the police station, serving the northern bank. There are also two schools beyond the Ntonjelana river (Drakensberg side). A road now intrudes 10 km past the cultural centre into a sensitive area of the Mnweni. It is not difficult to forecast that more people will move into the area now that there is a road, and, no doubt, in due course a sprawling township will sadly be allowed to grow.

The Rockeries area itself (the name goes back to at least 1905) consists of uMponjwana, the two Mnweni Needles, and the mountain mass immediately to the south of uMponjwana. The Zulu name for it is Ntabamabutho, meaning the "Mountain of the Warriors". During the troubled times of Shaka, an amaNgwane impi is said to have camped in its shadows, hence the name. It was known to whites in the very early days. We have already seen how the Stocker brothers climbed here in 1888. High up in a lateral stream of Ntonjelan' ephumalanga, beneath the soaring precipices of South Saddle, is one of the most beautiful of Drakensberg caves. This is the cave I used in 1947, as described in Chapter 5. Prior to 1930 it had only been used twice by small climbing parties, while up to 1930 the Ntonjelana Pass, just beyond the cave, had never been traversed by a white man, as far as is known, apart from the Stockers in 1888. Recent population pressure has now forced the amaNgwane living in the low-lying areas further and further up this lovely valley, and this beautiful cave today it is uninhabitable.

The lovely Mnweni — with the Mnweni Needles and tall, connical uMponjwana in the background

Malcolm Pearse

Of the area to the north, between Rockeries and Mount Amery, William Anderson, of the Surveyor-General's Department, said in 1907 that it was "practically unknown and inaccessible ... an inhospitable region". He said further that there was no known pass between Goodoo in the Natal National Park and Bushman's Pass, south of Champagne Castle. Actually there are at least five, well known today. A map in Henry Brooks' *Natal*, published in 1876, shows the Mnweni rising near iNtaba'mhlophe, south of the Little uThukela, 65 km away from its correct position!

The Mnweni Needles (not to be confused with the Mnweni Pinnacles) are the two pyramid-like peaks which jut out from uMponjwana. The Outer Needle (2 890 m) was the first to be climbed. In July 1921 Ken Cameron, Mr and Mrs Bassett-Smith and R.G. Kingdon set up their camp at the confluence of Saddle Stream, which rises at the Saddle, and Ntonjelan' eshonalanga. The next day, 22 July, they set out to climb the peak, making for the south-east ridge. It was a long, hard climb, and by

11 am Mrs Bassett-Smith and Kingdon had had enough. They dropped out and rested on a ledge, while Cameron and Bassett-Smith battled on alone. After five and a half hours, at 1.30 pm, the two men finally reached the top.

A few days later Cameron and Bassett-Smith made an attempt on the Inner Needle (2 905 m). It proved to be a far more severe climb than the Outer Needle. They climbed to within 60 m of the summit, but the prize was not to be theirs, and they had to give up. For 22 years the peak remained inviolate, and it was not until 1943 that its summit was finally reached. In May of that year A.S. Hooper, P.B. Fenger and Elizabeth Burton, climbing in a high wind, were the first to conquer it.

The two Mnweni Pinnacles are shy peaks. Rarely do they reveal their spear-like summits to the eye of man, for they are hidden away in the Mnweni Cutback. The Inner Pinnacle (3 100 m) appears the more formidable of the two, with its slender pointed profile. The Outer Pinnacle (3 096 m) has a broader base, and appears the easier, but this is not so. The Outer Pinnacle still ranks as one of the most difficult climbs in the Drakensberg. In spite of this, it was the Outer Pinnacle that was the first to be climbed. On 20 December 1948, George Thomson, Charles Gloster, Des Watkins and Barry Anderson climbed down an easy gully from the top of the escarpment to the base of the Inner Pinnacle. From there they made their way into the nek between the two Pinnacles, and so on to the face of the peak. Halfway up Watkins and Anderson found the going too severe, and had to fall out, but Thomson and Gloster went on alone to conquer the peak. The reason for this was that Thomson and Gloster were climbing in "takkies", the climbing shoes of the day, while Watkins and Anderson were wearing miners' boots, which made it impossible for them to go any further.

Seven months later the Inner Pinnacle was climbed for the first time, the honours going to Jannie Graaff, Phyl Goodwin, Bob de Carle and Roy Buckland. The date was July 1949.

Saddle (2 972 m) is one of the most prominent peaks in the Drakensberg. The Stockers called it Segwana Cirque, though where they got the name Segwana from I have not been able to discover. The Zulu name is Ntaba Busuku, "The Mountain of the Night", because, they say, the night clings to the face of the mountain, the southern buttress sheltering it in the morning, and the northern buttress in the afternoon, casting long purple shadows across its mighty basalt face. It consists of a sheer, slightly curved wall, with two flanking peaks, North Saddle and South Saddle. Both these peaks are separated from the main wall of the escarpment, North Saddle by a steep and narrow cleft, which can only be negotiated by a crack climber. The central wall of the Saddle is easily climbed from the summit of the escarpment, while a frontal assault, via a wide crack, is not difficult. This route was opened up in July 1934 by Brian Godbold and F.E. Ellis.

South Saddle is not a very difficult peak to climb, certainly from the escarpment summit. The first man to reach the top was Jannie Graaff, in 1947. Climbing solo, he descended into the 60 m gap which separates the peak from the main escarpment, and so on to the face and up to the summit.

North Saddle is a very different proposition. The Stockers first had a look at it in 1888, but they did not even attempt it. Bassett-Smith explored it, and made an abortive attempt to climb it in July 1921. In September 1968 the main face was climbed by Roger Fuggle, Tony Dick, Carl Fatti and B. Manicom, from the Ntonjelana valley.

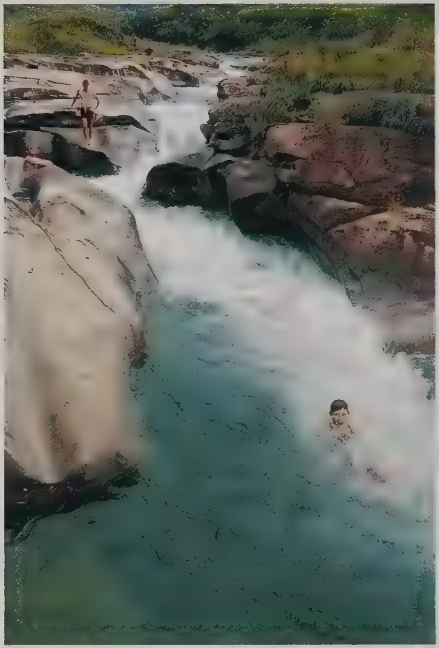
Rockeries Peak, in the serrated row of pinnacles known collectively as "The Rockeries", was one of the last great peaks in the Drakensberg to be conquered. Although formidable, it still does not rank with the peers,

Rockeries Peak (not to be confused with the Rockeries Tower which has more recently become generally known by its Zulu name — uMponjwana) Malcolm Pearse like Column and Devil's Tooth. It proved to be a long and exhausting climb for R.F. Davies, June Slinger, J. de V. Graaff and D. Williamson. They camped in the valley below on a day in 1953, and set off for their climb in the early morning, but it was not until 21 hours later that they were back in camp after conquering the peak. Rockeries Peak, not to be confused with Rockeries Tower (uMponjwana), is the last of the serrated peaks which stretch out in a south-easterly direction from the main Rockeries massif. It is known to the experts as Peak D.

There are many other first-class climbs in this little-known area, of which we need notice only the two Ifidi Pinnacles and the Ntonjelana Needle. The South Ifidi Pinnacle was first climbed by Gillian Bettle and Martin Winter in 1952, while the North Pinnacle fell to Martin Winter and Malcolm Moor in 1959. The Ntonjelana Needle was first climbed by Brian Godbold in 1934. This slender spire is the last of the Chessmen, nearest the Mitre, and its name is very appropriate, for it has a small hole in the tip like the eye of a needle.

I first came to the eastern Ntonjelana (Ntonjelan' ephumalanga) in October 1947 while I was mapping the Cathedral area, when I dipped down from Twins Cave and spent those never-to-be-forgotten days in the cave beneath the towering precipices of South Saddle, which I have already described. I loved it then, and I have loved it ever since. Four and a half years later I was back, with my son Malcolm this time, who was still a schoolboy. We traversed the whole of the valley during Easter of 1952, entering from the Cathedral area by way of Ganapu Ridge and the Three Puddings, spending three days in the cave below South Saddle, and then trekking across into the Mnweni. Here we discovered a series of magnificent rock pools, each the size of a small swimming bath, into which the Mnweni River roared and foamed. We spent a day here, and then went over Mole Hill and across the Ifidi River. At the top of Mole Hill, which we climbed, we had lunch and left a couple of empty Oxo tins there[1]. Years later I read an account in the Mountain Club journal of 1958 of another ascent of Mole Hill. The party that climbed it were hoping to make a first ascent, but to their surprise, and chagrin, found at the top an ancient Oxo tin!

We were now in the lovely valley of the Setene, and here we lazed away four days on warm, sunlit grass, before crossing over the Mount Oompie Ridge into the ubuSingatha valley, and so into the uThukela and the Royal Natal National Park. We went back many times.



Mnweni Baths Malcolm Pearse

On most of these trips we established the most cordial relations with the amaZizi and the amaNgwane, hoeing in their fields as we passed by. Always it was *"Phumaphi? Uyaphi?"* ("Where do you come from? Where are you going?"), the handing over of the inevitable handfuls of ugwayi (tobacco), and the final cheery *"Hambani kahle, banumzane"* ("Go well, sirs") from them, and from us *"Hlala kahle"* ("Stay well"), as we went on our way.

But once it was not so.

We had entered the valley this time by the lovely red winding road which branches off from Rookdale Mission. It was December 1955, midsummer, and we marched all day in the blinding heat, but always with the beckoning mountains before us. Towards dusk we reached the

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[1] A practice frowned upon today, and not to be recommended. Mountain etiquette has changed over the years, and today requires that all litter be brought home and disposed of there.

Mnweni River, which we would have to ford. In the mealie fields were a group of amaNgwane still busy with their hoes. But there were no cheery greetings this time. We were met with silence and averted eyes. The river was in flood, and the crossing would be difficult. We were tired. Under normal circumstances I would have suggested camping for the night on the nearer bank, and tackling the crossing in the morning. But I was filled with a vague sense of uneasiness. Malcolm was still a young lad, and I did not wish to alarm him. I said nothing except "Let's cross now." That night, sitting round our camp fire, he said to me, "You know, Dad, I'm glad we decided to cross first, before we camped for the night. I didn't like the look of those amaNgwane."

Two months later, almost to the day, the news broke: "Policemen hacked to death. Grim scenes of massacre in Drakensberg foothills." The scene of the massacre was only a short distance below where we had crossed the river two months previously.

On Tuesday morning, 21 February 1956, a large party of seven white and 15 black policemen had set out from Ladysmith on a dagga raid into the Mnweni valley. In command was Sergeant S.J.D. de Lange, of the Ladysmith Police, 46 years old, a married man with five children. He was due to go on pension in three years' time. He was an extremely popular police officer, not only with his comrades in the police, but with the blacks of the whole district. He knew them well and was always scrupulously fair in his manner. They knew him as "Sergeant Shorty".

Sergeant S.J.D. de Lange

Courtesy Mrs I.M. de Lange

These dagga raids are made periodically into the KwaZulu areas of the Drakensberg, which are notorious for the large fields of dagga cultivated there. On these raids quantities of dagga are destroyed, and anyone found in possession of the narcotic weed arrested.

On that first day quantities of dagga were found and a number of arrests made. That evening some of the police returned to Bergville, but a large party camped at Rivulette, the farm of Carl Zunckel.

Next morning the police split up into several smaller "sorties", with about eight men in each party. On the previous day they had been armed with Sten guns and revolvers. On this particular day they left their Sten guns in camp, and were armed only with revolvers. The weather was wet, drizzly and cold.

Sergeant de Lange's party consisted of himself; Lance-Sergeant J. Koorts, 33 years old and only recently married; Constable T. Kruger, a young man of 22, who had just been transferred to Ladysmith from Witsieshoek; a black Sergeant, Sergeant Langa; and four African constables, Gabela, Xaba, Sitole and Mbendse. They made good progress, and again quantities of dagga were found. In one small area over 50 dagga fields were discovered, one of them nearly 2,5 ha in extent. Soon they made their way up the Mnweni River, to a point only a couple of kilometres below where Malcolm and I had crossed two months previously. Here they confiscated another big haul of dagga. This they left at Zondo's kraal, and Constables Xaba and Sitole were assigned to guard it. The rest of De Lange's party then proceeded on to the further side of a small stream.

Up on the hillside, however, above Zondo's kraal, trouble seemed to be brewing. A large group of amaNgwane tribesmen appeared to be gathering, and from behind them, on the higher slopes, came the high-pitched, throbbing "*hihiza-ing*" of the women, as they egged their men on.

Suddenly, armed with sticks, knobkerries and assegais, they began to move down the hillside in the direction of Zondo's kraal. Constables Xaba and Sitole, left on guard there, saw them coming. For a few moments they held their ground. Then they began to move slowly away, in the direction of the rest of the party. Suddenly, the "*hihiza-ing*" of the women swelled to a mad frenzy, Xaba and Sitole ran for it, and the amaNgwane swept down upon them. Sitole was the first to fall. A knobkerrie from the pursuing amaNgwane arced across the sky, struck him on the head, and he fell dead. Xaba managed to cross the stream and reach De Lange, and the seven men closed ranks into a tight knot.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the stream the amaNgwane had reached the body of Sitole. Here they halted. Suddenly Constable Kruger drew his revolver and fired a single shot.

Galvanised into action as the echoes of the shot died away, De Lange sprang forward. He first of all remonstrated with Kruger for firing his gun, and he raised his hand and called on the amaNgwane to desist and to talk matters over with him. They hesitated, and for a moment it looked as if De Lange's tactics would be successful, but one man continued to urge them on. The "*hihiza-ing*" up on the hillside rose to a wild scream, a single cry of "*Bulaleni abelungu!*" ("Kill the white men!") rang out, and

the amaNgwane moved swiftly in to the attack.

Thirty seconds later it was all over. Constable Mbendse fought his way clear. As De Lange saw him breaking free he called to him to go to Zunckel's for help, but a moment later De Lange himself was down before he could even draw his revolver. Sergeant Langa, ringed with a dozen assegais, fell down the bank into the stream, struggled up, and managed to get away in the direction of Zunckel's farm. Constable Kruger, with a blow on his head, also fell into the stream, but not before he had fired another shot, killing his man. The other three men, like De Lange, went down under the plunging assegais and the savage knobkerries of the amaNgwane. And then there was silence. So sudden had been the attack on the police patrol that only Constable Kruger had had time to draw his revolver.

Fifteen minutes later (it was now 3 pm) an exhausted Mbendse raced up to Carl Zunckel's farm and gasped out De Lange's message: *"Ek is in moeilikheid!"* ("I am in trouble!"). Four white policemen who were at the farm set off immediately, in the direction De Lange's party had taken. In the long grass, on the banks of the stream, next to a huge patch of dagga, they came upon the grim scene: the bodies of De Lange, Koorts, Gabela, Xaba and Sitole, hacked to death. They had been so badly mutilated that they were barely recognisable. De Lange had 23 wounds in his body. Beside them one of their attackers lay dead. Kruger and Langa were missing, and it was thought they had been taken hostage by the fleeing amaNgwane tribesmen, who by that time had disappeared into the fastnesses of the Drakensberg.

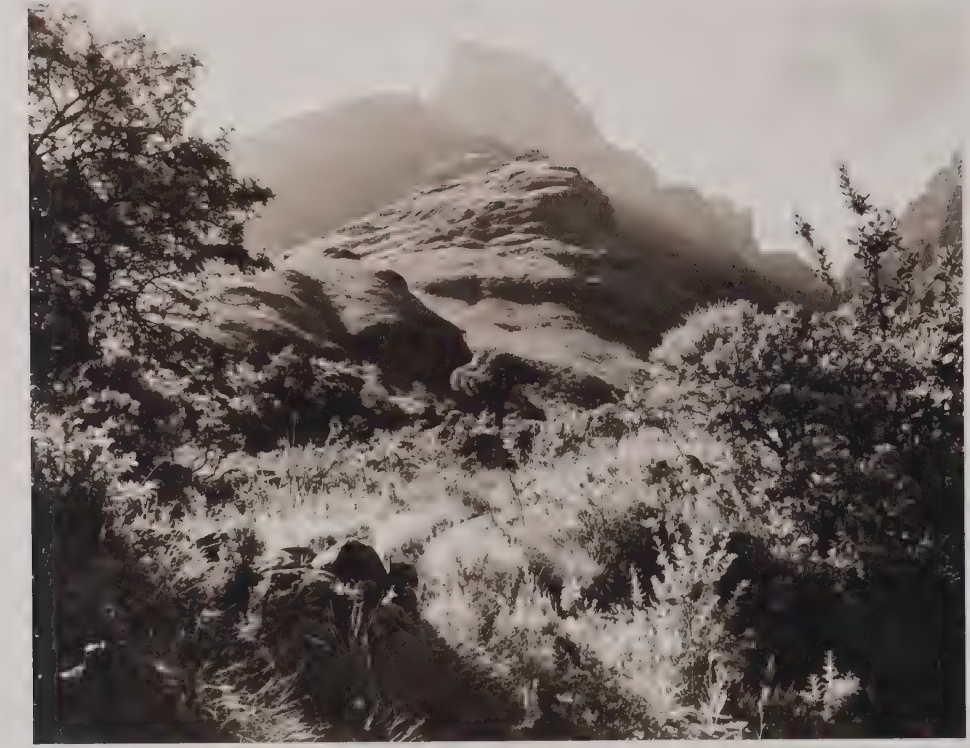
The police reacted swiftly and immediately. From all sides they swooped on the area. Bergville rushed in an emergency squad of police that night, and during the rest of the night reinforcements began to come in from Ladysmith, Colenso, Dundee, Bergville, Winterton, and Estcourt, every available man being put on the job. A detachment of 30 armed officers was sent up from Divisional Headquarters in Pietermaritzburg. Local farmers offered their help. The hotel at Bergville was turned into a temporary barracks. Captain Patrick Dillon, Ladysmith's District Commandant, moved in to take personal command of the men in the field.

Early on the Thursday Colonel R. de Wet van Heerden, Deputy Commissioner of Police for Natal, and Colonel W.A.E. Ayres, Chief of the CID, went from Pietermaritzburg to take overall charge of the vast police operations that were planned in the area. Harvard aircraft of the SAAF, under Major R.A. Gerneke, were flown in to guide the search patrols. They were fully armed with machine guns, and the pilots carried pistols. Brigadier C.J. Els, Assistant Commissioner of South African Police, flew from Pretoria. By Thursday night 85 policemen were camped on Carl Zunckel's farm. All were thrown into the hunt.

At the scene of the attack a radio station was set up, and with this the police kept constant contact with the patrolling Harvards and with police headquarters in Pretoria.

On the first day two amaNgwane tribesmen were shot dead, two were wounded, and 19 arrested. Day after day the hunt went on for the killers. Chief Ndungunye Hlongwane of the amaNgwane tribe gave his full support, and arrested several of the killers himself. Preparations were made to bomb the

The Drakensberg ... 'timeless, aloof, inscrutable, but with a wild beauty of its own" Malcolm Pearse



Malcolm Pearse

Ntonjelana - Mnweni

The south peak of The Saddle in the Ntonjelana area shimmers in the early morning sunlight fleeing tribesmen should they attempt to escape over the passes into Lesotho.

In the meantime, Constable Kruger and Sergeant Langa had turned up. When the attack started, Kruger alone, as we have seen, had managed to draw his revolver, and had shot one of the killers. Then, in the confusion, he escaped, making his way up the valley. Here, in a cave under a waterfall, he found refuge, and hid from the searching amaNgwane. He stayed hidden until nightfall, listening to the sounds of the tribesmen as they looked for him and tried to ferret him out. Night fell, and then he saw the lights of the truck which had come to remove the bodies of his comrades. Dazed and shaken, he stumbled along a shallow river, and then followed the lights of the truck back to Carl Zunckel's farmhouse, into which he staggered in the early hours of the morning. He was immediately rushed off to hospital.

Ladysmith, in the meanwhile, shocked at the tragedy, was a place of mourning. Flags at the Town Hall, the Municipal Offices and the Police Station were flown at half-mast. The families of the dead men received messages of sympathy from C.R. Swart, Minister of Justice, who announced the news of the tragedy to a hushed House of Assembly.

Day after day the hunt went on, and the Harvards droned in the clear sky above the high peaks. Day after day it continued, until the last of the killers were rounded up, to stand trial at the Native High Court in Pietermaritzburg, and peace came again to the remote valley of the Mnweni.

Months later the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg opened with Mr Justice A.A. Kennedy on the Bench, supported by two assessors, one of whom was Mr Justice (Acting) Ryle Masson (my brother-in-law). The dock was crowded with 26 amaNgwane tribesmen. When at last, on 9 August 1956, judgment was delivered, it was a scene believed to have had no parallel in South African criminal history, indeed in the whole of the British Commonwealth: 23 men sentenced to death together (one was subsequently reprieved, 24 hours before the execution). The nearest approach to it had been four years previously, when 11 Basotho, including a chief and chieftainess, had been executed in Maseru for a ritual murder.

And so, at last, the police were able to close their file. But still to this day, the tribesmen of the amaNgwane tell of the day when the great birds came to their mountain home, and smelt out the killers of the policemen.

The Mnweni massacre: Part of the trial was held at the scene of the attack. The Court in session. Mr Justice Kennedy to the left holding stick

Natal Mercury

High up on the summit, behind uMponjwana, or Rockeries Tower, as it is sometimes called, is the cave we have already referred to, uMponjwana Cave. It was here that we nursed Godfrey Symons, on a day back in 1958, when a billycan of boiling water spilt over his foot. It was Godfrey's first trip into the Drakensberg, and it was indeed a baptism of fire for him. Three days after it happened he marched all day, with a heavy pack, all down Rockeries Pass and through the foothills, back to our car, refusing all offers of help. If he had accepted our offer to go for a horse, he might have escaped the long weeks in hospital that awaited his return to civilisation. But it is not in Godfrey's nature to cry quits.

It was here, too, that Malcolm and I spent a memorable Christmas in 1956, when morning after morning the sunrises blazed in a splendour of bronze and gold over the distant Cathedral Range, and in the afternoons the peaks played hide and seek in the mist.

But to Martin Winter, veteran Drakensberg climber, uMponjwana Cave will always be associated with the memory of Derek Schaeffer.

Early in 1952 three young people teamed up as a climbing team: Martin Winter, farming near Frere, member of one of the oldest of Natal families (Winterton is named after his grandfather); Gillian Bettle, a young schoolteacher; and Derek Schaeffer, a promising Durban musician. In a good team there must be complete rapport between the various members of the team. There was exactly this understanding between Martin, Gillian and Derek. They climbed well, and had climbed many peaks together, notably the south-east arête of the Outer Tower in the Royal Natal National Park, the north-east buttress of Cathkin, The Column and the South Ifidi Pinnacle. They were ideally suited to each other.

On Friday, 3 April 1953, they set off from Cathedral Peak Hotel at 1 pm for an Easter weekend attempt on the Rockeries. They headed up the uMlambonje, with the intention of a first-night stop at Twins Cave, the cave I used in 1947 when I mapped the summit escarpment. But darkness overtook them before they reached the cave. A wet, drizzly mist came down, their packs were heavy, and in the intense cold, wet through, they had a pretty miserable last hour and a half before they reached the cave. Derek, especially, having had a bout of 'flu, was making heavy going.

They slept well, however, and were up at dawn next day, following the usual route to the Rockeries along the edge of the escarpment, past Ntonjelana Pass, the Saddle, and so on to Rockeries Pass and uMponjwana Cave. Unfortunately, the mist again came down, and it was miserably cold. They arrived at the cave just before dusk, tired out. Derek was in good spirits, although again, during the day, he had managed poorly. That night it was bitterly cold.

Sunday dawned clear, but soon the mists began to swirl about the ice-clad peaks, and a bitter north gale blew up. The rock was wet and slippery. Derek decided to rest that day, while Martin and Gillian made a preliminary reconnaissance of the peak they were to attempt to climb the following day. Derek went with them as far as the gap between Rockeries Tower and the escarpment edge, and then returned to the cave. Martin and Gillian were back about 1 pm. Derek was asleep. He slept most of the day, saying he felt terrible, although towards evening he seemed to revive a bit, and joined eagerly in their conversation.

Next morning, Monday, again dawned clear, with a magnificent sunrise. While watching it, the other two suddenly noticed that Derek was rambling in his talk. They examined him, and found him very weak and almost completely helpless. Thoroughly alarmed now at his sudden deterioration, they decided it was essential to get immediate help. Martin set off right away, leaving Gillian behind to care for the sick man.

All along the escarpment edge, past North Saddle and South Saddle, and down the uMlambonje, Martin raced. In three and threequarter hours he covered what had taken them a day and a half to cover on the way up, a most remarkable feat which must rank high in the annals of Drakensberg mountaineering. Then he burst into Cathedral Peak Hotel, and gasped out his story.

Albert van der Riet, the proprietor, known to so many mountaineers for his kindness and ready helpfulness, immediately swung into action. He summoned Fred Zunckel and his plane by telephone, obtained the best telephonic medical advice that he could (Derek's illness was diagnosed as pneumonia), collected medical supplies, especially penicillin, and then cared for Martin, who by then must have been on the point of exhaustion. At 2.30 pm he drove Martin down to a nearby airstrip, and at 3 pm Martin and Fred Zunckel took off, flying back to the Rockeries to make an attempt at landing. In the valley behind the cave was a fairly level piece of ground, but it was found to be strewn with rocks, and after several attempts Fred had to give up. A landing would have been sheer suicide. As they flew off Gillian's tiny figure could be seen at the entrance of the cave, waving hopefully.

Fred now flew down the Orange River in the direction of Mokhotlong, 43 km away. Here he dropped Martin at the airstrip, and then flew back to Cathedral to organise a stretcher party which was to set out at first light the following day. Martin's plan was to ride back that night to the cave with the penicillin.

By 8 pm Martin and his party were ready and mounted and on their way. They consisted of the resident medical officer, Dr P. Dale Lace; Alwyn Bisschoff, resident agricultural officer, two Basotho police troopers, two pack grooms and two pack-mules. There was no moon, and the wind was cold. In the darkness progress was painfully slow and dangerous. Fifteen times they had to cross the Orange, the water coming up to their feet. In places it was so steep that they had to dismount and lead their horses, and even then they were in great danger of crashing down into the depths below. They rode all through the night. Dawn broke. There was no sign of the escarpment, and they rode on.

At last, at 10 am on Tuesday, after 14 hours in the saddle they came out at the Ntonjelana Pass, instead of at the Mnweni, 8 km south of where they should have been, but at that very moment they could see the stretcher party coming up over from the Twins — five African men, and Mike Barrett, Bill Brockbank and Eddie Malan.

By this time the horses were exhausted, so, abandoning his mount, Martin made for the stretcher party on foot, joined it, and together they raced on to the cave.

Gillian, of course, was delighted to see them. Alone, she had cared for Derek all the previous day and night, with no sleep at all, had fed him, kept him warm, and changed his clothes when wet. She had seen the plane, but could not know what was happening. She had done a wonderful job. Derek was unconscious, but Martin injected the penicillin immediately, and then began to make preparations for the return home.

By that time the medical officer had arrived, but he could do nothing more, as he had no penicillin. During the morning a plane had flown over and dropped something, which they later discovered had been a packet of penicillin, but in spite of a search they had been unable to find it.

After a hurried lunch they set off at 3 pm, down Rockeries Pass. Anyone who knows this pass will realise what a nightmare journey they must have had. It is nothing but a wild jumble of rock and stone, and in places very steep.

Fortunately by this time three more men had joined them, but even so, with relays of bearers, the going was painfully slow and difficult.

The rescue party, Martin Winter at left, arriving at the Mnweni crossing with the stretcher carrying Derek Schaeffer Daily News

And all the time the plane circled slowly in the sky above them, unable to help, but keeping ceaseless watch. Periodically they signalled it with a white flag to signify life. In reserve was a black flag to signify death.

Martin Winter and Gillian Bettle after their arrival at the Mnweni crossing Daily News

By nightfall they were 460 m down the pass, and here, under some huge overhanging boulders, they made camp. Derek was made as comfortable as possible, in a sheltered place, and then they gathered round a fire for what little food they could muster — their supplies were running out. No one had any sleeping kit, so they slept round the fire. Fortunately the weather was settled, but the now clear sky after the passing of the cold front, made for a cold night. Derek responded a little to the injection, and his breathing seemed easier and more regular.

Next day, Wednesday, 8 April, they were off at first light, and made good progress on the easier ground. At midday, down in the foothills, they reached a sledge drawn by a team of eight oxen, which was waiting for them. Again, they were able to speed up with the help of the sledge, for this proved to be a fast and relatively comfortable means of transport.

But their food had by now given out, and their strength was beginning to fail. Martin, by this time, had already had two days and a night of non-stop physical effort, with little food, and only an hour or so of troubled sleep on the second night. At Makwela's kraal they were fed with dokwe[1] and boiled mealies, and then they hurried on.

Soon they reached the Ntonjelana. The river was full. They had to carry Derek across.

With night drawing on, they neared the Mnweni. Before they crossed it, Dr van Heerden, the district surgeon, gave Derek another two injections of penicillin, and sounded his heart. It was still fair, but his lungs were in a poor state, and from his shallow breathing it seemed clear to the watchers that the end must be near.

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[1] *Dokwe*: Mabele porridge allowed to go sour by non-alcoholic fermentation.

Then they commenced the crossing. The river had come down in full flood, the water was waist deep, and flowing like a millrace. In the fading light they carried Derek shoulder high, stumbling and floundering in the icy water. The bearers were told to let go their grip if they missed their footing. One last uphill grind, and they were at the waiting ambulance.

And not only the ambulance. There was food and drink, and a crowd of waiting journalists and jostling photographers, with cameras and popping flash-bulbs. They brushed them off, and hurried on to Bergville, where Derek was given oxygen, and then on to the Provincial Hospital at Ladysmith. He survived the journey, but, as he was being placed in his bed, he died. Gillian and Martin had lost a stout-hearted friend, and a wonderful climbing companion.

* * *

Three months later Martin was back at uMponjwana Cave, and I close this chapter with a brief excerpt from his logbook:

> At sunset on 10th July we held a ceremony on the point opposite Mponjwana, where I scattered Derek's ashes. The casket lay on this lonely hill-top, and on it was laid a sprig of Berg heather, with a few yellow daisies. Nearby was an ice-axe, standing erect. Present were Francis, Terry, Archie, John, Tony and myself. While we prayed I scattered the ashes over the edge of the escarpment, and then buried the casket near the summit.

"And everywhere are the clouds. Sometimes they sail in solemn splendour, slowly and ponderously, across the sky. Sometimes they lift and curl and boil around the indifferent peaks, opening up to reveal brief, tantalising glimpses of yawning, black abysses and shadowed gorges, only to close in again with their clinging white veils." — R.O. Pearse

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER II

CATHEDRAL OF THE SKIES

Here they heard a subtler music and
saw wider visions.
General Smuts, at the unveiling of the
Mountain Club War Memorial at Maclear's Beacon,
Table Mountain, 25 February 1923

It had been an unusually hard month at the school of which I was Headmaster. Perennial staff shortages, together with the August winds which are the curse of our Natal spring months, coupled with a series of intractable problems, had set my nerves on edge. We were fortunate in having at the school one of the finest sets of youngsters one could wish to have. Secretly I was more than a little proud of them, but even the best of youngsters can, at times, raise your blood pressure, and when the bell rang at three o'clock on that Friday afternoon I could quite cheerfully have wrung the necks of the whole lot of them!

uMlambonje River with snow-capped Inner and Outer Horns and Bell John Hone

Suddenly I thought of Cathedral Peak, and the broad valleys of the uMlambonje and the Umhlonhlo, the country I had grown to love when I had mapped it for Albert van der Riet, during 1947 and 1948. The bottlebrushes with their scarlet flames would still be out, the sky would be blue, and the trees of the forest would be standing, tall and proud, in their deep kloofs.

And why not? Monday was a holiday. Six hours would take me to the top of Organ Pipes Pass and to the high cave in the summit rocks of eNdumeni Dome, overlooking the pass. Three days were mine, and mine alone. I could leave for home again by midday on the Monday, and still be back in time for school on the Tuesday. Why not?

It took me only half an hour to get my sleeping-bag out and to pack my rucksack.

I camped that night in the valley of the Umhlonhlo. Next morning rabbit tracks laced the dew-laden grass, and the world was young. By midday, in clear sunlight, I was sitting at the entrance to my cave, and the billy was about to boil. Far below me the cloud shadows drifted across blue and distant hills. Everywhere was a great stillness. Down in the Little Berg there is always some sound, the rustle of leaves in the wind, the hum of insects, the faint splash of water. On the summit there is utter silence. Even the rustle of the wind in the grass is muted or stilled altogether.

But not quite. Away to my left, across a maze of shadowed valleys, was Cathedral Peak and the Bell. And, surely, was that not the Bell tolling! I could have sworn I heard its plangent notes, clear over miles of empty space, calling to worship. And I certainly heard the throbbing thunder of the Organ Pipes, far below, a sonorous thunder that swelled up into the vast dome of the arching sky, as the winds stirred and woke from their long sleep.

The view from the summit of the Drakensberg is always breathtaking. Never is it more so than in that short stretch of mountain splendour between eNdumeni Dome and the uMlambonje Buttress. Here is a vast panorama of toppling crags, battlemented spires, ruined towers and impregnable fortresses. Dark clefts fall sheer into the valleys a thousand metres below. Peak on peak stands clearly etched against blue horizons. And everywhere are the clouds. Sometimes they sail in solemn splendour, slowly and ponderously, across the sky. Sometimes they lift and curl and boil around the indifferent peaks, opening up to reveal brief, tantalising glimpses of yawning, black abysses and shadowed gorges, only to close in again with their clinging white veils. And sometimes their anger boils over in a black fury of storm and tempest, and the earth trembles.

A glance at the map will show that the Cathedral Peak area owes its grandeur largely to the fact that it is made up of two mountain ranges. There is, first of all, the main escarpment of the Drakensberg, running roughly north and south, and stretching from the uMlambonje Buttress to the Didima Dome, and secondly a most spectacular spur, 3,5 km long, jutting out at right-angles to the main Drakensberg, and culminating in Cathedral Peak (3 004 m) itself. The peaks of this spur are all the more majestic because, unlike most of the main Drakensberg peaks, they are free-standing. The uMlambonje River rises in the angle formed between this spur and the main Drakensberg, and into it flow such lovely streams as the Oqalweni, the Umhlonhlo, the Tseketseke and the Masongwana.

The whole of this mountain playground was known, and developed, much later than the other Drakensberg areas. Access to it was difficult, as it lies somewhat off the beaten track, and for many years there was no proper road leading into it. As late as 1907 the Third and Final Report of the Geological Survey of Natal and Zululand could say of the area between Mont-aux-Sources and Champagne Castle that it was practically unknown and inaccessible. According to some of the older black people living there, the first whites to come to the area arrived about 1910. As in other parts of the Drakensberg, these were woodcutters and hunting parties, followed by farmers who bought grazing farms, but did not necessarily occupy them. The name Cathedral, however, goes back to at least 1905, though, as we shall shortly indicate, this may not have been the peak we know as Cathedral today.

By 1918 eight farms had been established in the area, Solar Cliffs, Brotherton, Gewaagd, Tryme, Inhoek, Schaapkraal, Hopeton and Leafmore. These all belonged to I.J.M. ("Ryk Isak") Buys (not to be confused with Groot Isak Buys, his cousin, another prominent character of the period). Ryk Isak farmed at Kransfontein, in the Free State, and in 1918 he sent his foreman, Sybrand Vermeulen, down to live at Tryme to look after his eight farms. Sybrand must have been one of the earliest permanent residents in the area. He prospered, and later he bought Tryme from Buys. In 1924 Ryk Isak sent another of his foremen down, to live at Leafmore and look after his sheep there. He was Willem J. Oosthuizen. Leafmore and Hopeton are on the left bank of the uMlambonje, just below the present Cathedral Peak Hotel. He lived in a little plat-dak house on the boundary of Leafmore and Hopeton. Its ruins can still be seen today, but even in Oosthuizen's time it was an old house. During the 1914 Rebellion, horses in the Free State were being commandeered by the military, and Ryk Izak sent all his horses down to Leafmore and hid them there, even quartering some of them in the bedroom, it is said! Then Oosthuizen, the foreman, in his turn bought Leafmore and Hopeton, and it was probably he who built the present Leafmore homestead.

By now Ryk Isak was tired of his Berg farms, and one after another they were sold, Solar Cliffs to Anton Lombard; Brotherton to Stoffel van Rooyen, another of Isak's foremen; and Gewaagd to Jan P. Roux, who married one of Isak's daughters. Finally, in 1937, Philip van der Riet, farming at Olivia, near the present Oliviershoek Police Post and store, bought Inhoek and Schaapkraal from Isak, with the idea of building an hotel there.

But it was Albert, his son, who was the moving spirit in the venture. Albert knew the area well. As a boy he had hunted in the valleys of the uMlambonje, the Umhlonhlo and the uMhlwazini. In 1934 he had stocked the uMlambonje with brown trout from the Mooi and the Bushman's Rivers. In 1938 he selected the site of the present hotel. It had one great asset — it was nearer the mountains than any other Drakensberg hotel.

And so the Cathedral Peak Hotel, known to thousands of South Africans for its gracious hospitality and its magnificent scenery, was born. Like Otto Zunckel and his sons, Albert was a born hotelier. He and his charming wife, Doreen, brought to their hotel that personal touch, genial friendliness and gracious charm which has made the Cathedral Peak Hotel one of the best-loved holiday resorts in South Africa.

In 1938 they started to build. Their nearest railhead was Winterton, a tiny village 45 km away. Established in 1905, it was first called Springfield, and five years later was renamed Winterton, after H.D. Winter, Minister of Agriculture and later of Native Affairs in the old Natal Government. Between Winterton and the proposed hotel was a road which in places was little more than a sledge track. Undaunted, Philip and his two sons laid the first bricks. They welcomed their first guests in time for Christmas 1939.

Albert died in early December 1987, but in his day he was the leading Drakensberg hotelier, undisputed king of the beautiful Cathedral area where his hotel is situated, and a great and genuine lover of the mountains. But I do not know which he loved more, the mountains or the sea, for Albert had an even bigger claim to fame: at 70 he was one of the world's greatest big-game fishermen. At his best he was one of only eight men in the world to have caught the three greatest big game fish, marlin, bluefin tuna and broadbill swordfish. In a tournament in 1962 he boated eight bluefin tuna in one day, a world record at the time, and the following day he caught seven more, winning the tournament for the South African team.

In 1955 Albert was elected to represent South Africa in the Commonwealth team. For 11 years, as a member and later captain of the South African team, he took part in the Bahamas International Contest, the premier fishing contest in the world, winning it three times in nine years, South Africa being the only country in the world to do this. Twice in those nine years he was the individual winner.

Through it all Albert won the respect and the deep affection of the world's top fishermen. His warm camaraderie was long a byword among them all. In 1969 South Africa was barred from the Bahamas International because of political pressure. To a man, the other competing teams immediately withdrew, in sympathy with the South African team, but particularly because of their high regard for Albert van der Riet. What a tribute to this quiet and unassuming man!

It was difficult to get Albert to talk of his successes. As a sportsman he was in a class of his own. Twice he successfully protested, to his own detriment, on behalf of rival fishing teams who, in his opinion, had been wrongly penalised. During the Bahamas contests he used to send each competitor a case of South African wine as a personal gift. Today his name is still legendary in international fishing circles.

Cathedral Peak itself, at the end of the subsidiary chain, is easily the most dominant peak in the area. Its name is something of a mystery, for anything less like a cathedral is difficult to imagine. Many years ago it was called Zikhali's Horn.

Zikhali was the son of our old friend Matiwane. When Matiwane was killed by Dingane, Zikhali's life was spared. But when Dingane was assassinated, Zikhali fled to Swaziland, and took refuge with King Sobhuza. There he fell in love with Sobhuza's daughter, Nomlalazi. The king, however, had heard too many stories of Matiwane. He did not want his royal house allied with anyone even distantly related to this old scoundrel, and certainly not his son. There was only one way out of the difficulty: Zikhali would have to go the way of his father. A plot was duly hatched, and it was arranged that Zikhali would be set upon one night in his hut, and murdered. But Nomlalazi came to hear of the plot, and warned her lover in time. Zikhali got out as fast as he could, and headed for the pleasant hills and valleys of the Drakensberg, where he had spent his boyhood. Here he was given permission to settle. He gathered together the scattered remnants of the amaNgwane tribe that had been left behind when Matiwane fled to the Free State, and there, in due course, Nomlalazi joined him. The amaNgwane royal house is thus partly Swazi. Zikhali and his young wife established their kraal under the shadow of the peak which for many years was known as Zikhali's Horn.

Bishop Colenso visited Zikhali in 1854, and was not impressed. He described him as "not of very prepossessing appearance. He looks dissipated, and is very haughty and overbearing in his manners". D.C.F. Moodie, however, the author, described him as "truly a magnificent savage, tall, fine features, commanding appearance, and polite and dignified in manner"! He died in 1863, having fathered 28 sons, one of whom was involved in the murder of Moncrieff, described elsewhere in this book.

How, and when, the name was changed to Cathedral Peak is not known. The name Cathedral first appears round about 1905. I have long had the suspicion that there has been a transposition of names here. Eleven kilometres to the north-west of Cathedral is the mountain we have already dealt with, the Rockeries, which does look exactly like a cathedral. From the plains of Natal it appears a solid, rectangular block,

The Column - viewed from the Tseketseke valley

Malcolm Pearse

with a high-pointed dome — uMponjwana or The Rockeries, as it was once known — at one end. I had wondered whether this mountain mass had not originally been given the name Cathedral, and whether popular usage had not transferred the name to the much better-known Zikhali's Horn. This is rendered more feasible when one remembers that Organ Pipes Pass and the Bell were names already known in the area. In about 1972 I was able to establish the correctness of this theory. I discovered in the Natal Archives an old map of Natal by Masson, published in 1904, which clearly names the Rockeries "The Cathedral", and at least two Government maps have perpetuated this. The 1:250 000 Topocadastral Map, published in 1936, and the 1:250 000 Topographical Map, published in 1948, both call Rockeries Pass "Cathedral Pass". The Military Map compiled for General Redvers Buller in 1900 also calls the Rockeries "Cathedral".

When it was that the name was transferred from the Rockeries to the present Cathedral Peak I have not been able to discover, but by 1916 the present nomenclature had been clearly established.

Personally, I regret that the original Zulu names have not been used in the naming of our Drakensberg peaks. Cathedral Peak should have been called either Zikhali's Horn or, an even earlier name, uMponjwana, which means the Little Horn; and Rockeries (I cannot imagine a worse name for a mountain!) should have retained its Zulu name of

A slender finger of rock in the Organ Pipes Pass points to the heavens

Malcolm Pearse

Ntabamabutho, the Mountain of the Warriors. To call it uMponjwana is quite incorrect, for this is the original name for Cathedral Peak.

Whatever its correct name — Cathedral Peak, Zikhali's Horn, or uMponjwana — it is a noble peak and a landmark for miles around. It is easily climbed in a day from the hotel, no rope being required. Hardy Ballington, a five-times winner of the Comrades Marathon, holds the record, from hotel to the summit and back, in the incredible time of two hours 20 minutes, in 1952. The first ascent was made by D.W. Bassett-Smith and R.G. Kingdon in July 1917.

Working now inwards towards the main escarpment, the next peak is the Bell (2 930 m). The various attempts to climb this peak have been dealt with in Chapter 6. Next to the Bell are the two Horns, the Inner Horn (3 005 m), and the Outer Horn (3 006 m). They were named in about 1923, the names possibly being derived from the Zulu name for Cathedral Peak, uMponjwana, The Little Horn.

The first to be climbed was the Inner Horn. In 1925 a party led by H.G. Botha-Reid was the first to reach the summit. The area was still largely unknown. Only four peaks in the area had so far been named — Cathedral, the Bell and the two Horns. In 1940 Mike and Elizabeth Burton opened up a new route on the Inner Horn. Mike was a prominent Transvaal climber, whose death a few years later in World War II brought to an end a most promising climbing career.

It was not until 1934 that the Outer Horn was climbed. The honour went to Doyle Liebenberg, Doc Ripley, H.G. Botha-Reid and F.S. Brown. On this first occasion they climbed the Western Buttress face. This peak actually offers several climbs of moderately difficult standard. A party led by Brian Godbold made a sensational ascent in 1936, while in 1940 Doyle Liebenberg's party discovered a new route up the east face. This was a fairly easy route of C standard, which had been missed by previous climbing parties.

Next to the two Horns, and still moving west-wards, are the Chessmen. These consist of a whole series of small, jagged spires, at about the 3 000 m level, and extending for about 800 m. They look formidable from below, but are quite easy to climb, most of them being B, C or D standard. The Zulu name for them is Ibotwana, meaning "The Children". In the early 1930s they were called Saw-tooth Ridge, while the Stockers called them the Needles, but in 1931 Professor Sweeney gave them their present name and entered it on his map. By 1936 the new name was in general use. A traverse from one end of the Chessmen to the other offers a most spectacular, and not too difficult, climb.

Next to the Chessmen stands another prominent peak, the Mitre

(3 023 m), also named by Professor Sweeney in 1931. The first ascent was made during the July camp of 1938, by a party led by Brian Godbold. They approached the peak from the Ntonjelana valley, and climbed its northern face. The second ascent was made in May 1941 by Tony Hooper, Margery Robinson, Mary Lear and Else Wong. This was a new route, up the north-east face.

Between the Mitre and the escarpment lie the Twins. Actually there are three summits, and the peak should more correctly be called the Triplets, but from down below one of the three peaks is hidden behind the others, and there appear to be only two summits. It is better to retain the name Twins, to avoid confusion with the Injisuthi Triplets further south. Here, too, in the north face, is the well-known Twins Cave. The three summits were reached for the first time during the 1931 July Camp in the Ntonjelana valley, by a party led by Professor Sweeney.

The peaks along the main Drakensberg, stretching from the uMlambonje Buttress southwards for 15 km, are all on the escarpment, except for two free-standing peaks, the Column (2 929 m) and the Pyramid (2 926 m). Working from north-west to south-east they are the uMlambonje Buttress, Elephant (3 139 m), Cockade (3 112 m), Cleft Peak (3 281 m), Castle Buttress, eNdumeni Dome (3 255 m) and Windsor Castle (3 065 m). Behind them stretch the rolling hills and valleys of Lesotho, that fascinating land of sunshine, cloud, horsemen, colourful blankets and trout streams. South-west of Windsor Castle lies the Didima Cutback, with Little Saddle (3 075 m), the Sphinx (2 669 m), the Sugarloaf (2 715 m) and Didima Dome (3 063 m) as the main peaks.

This whole area had been visited briefly in 1925 by members of the Natal Mountain Club. Organ Pipes Pass was opened in that year by Professor Sweeney and Reg Holden, and eNdumeni Dome was named. In 1936 the Natal Mountain Club held its July camp in the uMlambonje valley, and a much more thorough exploration of all the peaks from the Twins to Castle Buttress and beyond was made. Many of the names of these peaks date from this occasion. The peaks between Castle Buttress and Didima Dome had been explored the previous year during the camp in the Didima valley. They are all easily climbed from the western, Lesotho, side, in other words from the summit of the escarpment. The escarpment is reached without difficulty via Organ Pipes Pass.

This pass lies immediately south of Castle Buttress, beneath the massive bulk of eNdumeni Dome, and has been known since the earliest days. It was the pass used by the emissaries of Moshoeshoe in 1823, when he sought help of uShaka. At the top is a line of huge fluted columns from which the name Organ Pipes is derived. But in the early days it was known by many other names. At one time it was called Old Bushman's Pass, and also Qolo-la-masoja, the Soldier's Ridge, and one old map calls it "Soldaten pas". I am not sure whether this name derives from the fluted columns, which might be regarded as a regiment of soldiers standing to attention, or from the fact that tradition associates it with military action. Old cartridge shells of the soft Martini-Henry type have been found in the pass, and there is a tradition that the Carbineers hunted Bushmen there in the 1860s.

On a rainswept, windy night in March 1947 a feat of epic courage and endurance was enacted in this mountain pass. Five months earlier, on the night of 26 October 1946, a Mr and Mrs Louw, an elderly couple living at Chievely, had been murdered in their beds. Three men were arrested by the police and lodged in the Estcourt jail, but on the night of 16 December they slit the throat of one of their guards and escaped. Two of them were arrested almost immediately, but the third, Xungu Ntshaba, vanished completely. Sergeant Boshoff, of the Estcourt Police, was put in charge of the case. I knew him well. For a long time he would not talk of what had happened but eventually I managed to get the story out of him.

Week after week, relentlessly, he had followed the trail. Several times he nearly caught up with his man, only to be disappointed at the last minute. Three months went by, and then Boshoff heard that the wanted man was in the Cathedral area, and was about to escape into Lesotho via the Organ Pipes Pass. Hot-foot, Boshoff set out. He arrived at the hotel at 4 pm, and immediately left for the pass. It was a cold, wet, rainy night, and all through the hours of darkness he climbed, higher and higher, with no equipment or warm clothing.

At dawn he came out on the summit, and at 6.45 am he was approaching a Basotho kraal on the hillside. The dogs started to bark, and a man ran out from one of the huts and made off up the mountainside. Boshoff brought him down with his second shot, through the thigh, and then began the long march back home into Natal with his prisoner. The rain turned to snow. It got darker and darker. With the wounded man handcuffed to him, weary and exhausted, Boshoff stumbled down the pass and back to the hotel. It took him 13 hours (the normal time would be about five hours), and darkness had already fallen again before he reached the hotel. His boots were in tatters, his feet raw, eyes red

Dave Osborne, Monk's Cowl forester for many years, surveys the view from the heights of Cleft Peak John Hone

and swollen from snow-blindness, but he had got his man! Ntshaba was subsequently tried in the Supreme Court and sentenced to death.

The highest of these peaks on the main escarpment is Cleft Peak. This is one of the highest points in the whole Drakensberg, and the view from the summit is truly magnificent. The whole range, from Champagne Castle to Mont-aux-Sources, is seen stretching north and south, together with the peaks of the Cathedral Range, and Pyramid and Column in the foreground. It was first explored in 1936 by Doyle Liebenberg and Doc Ripley. They made their way up Organ Pipes Pass, and then turned north and ascended the southern slopes of Cleft Peak, an easy but rather exhausting climb. It is the route taken today by the average tourist.

Brian Godbold leads the way to climb Cleft Peak, 1936 MCSA Archives

A much more sensational ascent of the peak, however, was made in 1946. Cleft Peak gets its name from a huge vertical gash in the mountainside, running down slightly from right to left as one faces the peak from the Natal side. It was up this narrow and nearly vertical cleft that the ascent was made by a party of three climbers, consisting of Brian Godbold, A. Millard and his wife, Naomi (née Bokenham).

They left the main camp down in the uMlambonje, and sub-camped at the base of the mountain. Next morning, 17 July 1946, they set out at 5 am, a full hour before it was light, and after some stiff climbing, managed to get into the cleft. There followed, according to Brian, "some of the most strenuous and sustained chimney work ever experienced by any member of the party". The cleft was very narrow, and chockstones abounded. They climbed in light clothes and takkies. So narrow was the cleft that they were unable to carry their packs on their backs. These had to be hauled up one by one by rope. It was back-breaking work. Hour after hour they battled their way upwards. By 5 pm they were very near the top, but night fell before they could reach the summit. The cold was intense in this narrow cleft into which the sun never shone. They climbed in the light of torches dangling from their necks, their fingers frozen and groping desperately for the tiny fingerholds. The final chimney was quite impossible, and they had to traverse out in the inky darkness on to the sheer right wall, and thence up a gully. This was the most dangerous and spine-chilling part of the whole climb. Double roping was necessary.

Finally, at 8.30 pm, they were out and on top, in pitch darkness, in a bitter wind and clad in the thinnest of clothing. And they were still six hours away from home and shelter! Wearily they made their way down the south face of the mountain to the escarpment plateau, and then commenced the long march home, down Organ Pipes Pass, skirting the Camel, from there into the valley of the Umhlonhlo, and so home to base camp in the uMlambonje. Dead-beat, they stumbled into camp at 2.15 am, after nearly 24 hours of non-stop climbing. This must surely rank as one of the greater climbing feats in the Drakensberg.

It was on this windswept plateau above Organ Pipes Pass that I once

Malcolm Pearse

Organ Pipes Pass

A place "for the man who is prepared to go out on the two legs God gave him, carrying his food on his back, and be glad to make the effort..."

experienced one of the most terrible storms I have ever known. Natal storms are often tremendous, and nowhere are they more impressive and more frightening than in the Drakensberg. Here the clouds gather and build up, and then sweep down over the land, travelling for hundreds of kilometres. But sometimes they seem loath to leave the place of their birth, and for hours on end they pound and hammer the mighty crags. That is what happened on that summer's day in 1948 when, late in the afternoon, all hell broke loose on that lonely plateau.

I had been mapping the area around Windsor Castle and Little Saddle, and was returning to my cave behind the fluted columns of the Organ Pipes. It had been a long, hard day, and I was tired, but not too tired to notice a subtle change in the atmosphere. As I began to round the shoulder of eNdumeni Dome (by a strange coincidence the very name, in Zulu, means "The Mountain of Thunderstorms") I became conscious of a strange stillness in the air. The bright beauty of midday had gone, and in the dead, windless atmosphere there was a hint of menace. Then I noticed that heavy, dark clouds were gathering over Cleft Peak and the Pyramid, and from the north came the distant mutter of thunder, but it was still a long way off, and I was not unduly concerned.

Suddenly, with one mighty roar, the world exploded — one single, terrifying crash. So close was it that I could hear the thin, sharp crackle of the lightning a split second before the roar came, and smell the sharp, pungent smell of sulphur. Then silence, utter and complete; in some ways even worse than the actual thunderclap. In times of danger it is a great comfort to have another human being beside you. Though he can do nothing to help, his very presence warms the heart and helps to cut the gathering web of terror. That is what makes mountain-climbing in the company of stout comrades the heart-warming thing it is. But I was alone, on an empty plain, and even in the short time it had taken me to realise the predicament I was in there came a second ear-splitting crash, followed, as before, by utter stillness. Not a blade of grass moved. Not a sound. The only shelter was the escarpment edge, a kilometre away, and I made for this.

But long before I reached that haven of refuge the storm was upon me. Suddenly it was so dark that I could hardly see where I was going. And now, one after another, with terrifying regularity, came those thunder-crashes, the noise at last merging into one long, continuous roar. Then the rain came in solid sheets, and the wind, and lashing hail. It beat into my face and tore at my clothing as I struggled on.

How I reached the edge and stumbled over I do not know — a short, steep slope before the final 300 m drop, and with a line of overhanging rock halfway down. Within seconds I was there and flinging myself under the sheltering overhang.

From there I watched the storm. The wind leapt the crags, roared down into the depths below and slammed the rain in savage gusts against the streaming precipices. The day was drowned in darkness, except when it was lit by the angry flame of lightning, which by now was almost continuous. The noise was simply appalling — the maddened howl of the wind, the thunder, the hail, and the torrents of falling rain, all blended in one wild, roaring tumult of sound. I watched the lightning striking the pinnacles of Castle Buttress, and probing into the cauldron of boiling clouds below. It almost seemed a thing alive, streaming like molten iron. Were you safe under sheltering rocks? Did lightning strike there? I could not remember, and I did not even try to, for my mind was numb under the shattering blows of thunder.

And then came the noise of the water, even above the roar of the storm. The sound came from behind, a new sound to be added to the cacophony of sound around me, menacing, all the worse because of the threat of the unknown. At first I could not make out what it was. It sounded like an express train at the far end of a tunnel. And then over the edge it came, a roaring flood of hurrying water. Fortunately the line of rock above me broke its course, and it thundered past on both sides, pouring down the slope and into the depths below. And still the thunder roared, as if imprisoned within the mighty battlements of the peaks.

The storm lasted for well over an hour. Every now and then it would slacken off, and the worst seemed to be over, but back it came with redoubled fury. At last it rolled away, down into the valleys and away over the plains of Natal. Intervals began to appear between the flashes of lightning and the crash of thunder.

Slowly the peaks separated themselves from the clouds, and began to stand out against a rain-washed sky. Up from below came the sound of innumerable waterfalls, drowned hitherto in the roar of the storm, and wraiths of white mist began to drift slowly across the face of the peaks. And then, away to the north-east, the sky slowly gleamed a pale lemon-green as the night crept up from the valleys below. The daylight died, and soon it was quite dark.

I shouldered my rucksack and my survey instruments and made my way down by torchlight over the sodden ground to my cave behind the

Organ Pipes.

Lightning is always a hazard in the Drakensberg, and fatalities are not unknown. In 1922 three young men, riding back from Mont-aux-Sources, were all struck dead. The coins in the purse of one of them were all melted into a solid mass.

What should one do if one is caught out in the open in a storm such as the one I have described? Remember that the safest place is a car or a brick building. Make for either of these if you can. Thatched mud huts are deathtraps; and there is never a summer in Natal without at least half a dozen of the local huts going up in flames after being struck by lightning. This is because they get wet and their insulation is poor. One should keep away from trees. A clump of trees is safer than a single tree, but even clumps of trees should be avoided. Keep away also from iron fences and from cattle. If one is on horseback, one should dismount, and move away from one's mount. Keep away also from rock outcrops and high ridges, and it is unwise to try and shelter under an overhang. (I was quite wrong in attempting to do this in the storm I have described above.) The experts say one should keep off high points, and there certainly is something in this, though I have often been high on a slope of a mountain and watched the lightning striking below me. The safest thing to do if one is caught out in the open in a bad storm is to sit (not lie) down, in the wide open veld with one's knees drawn up and one's arms around them, if possible wearing a waterproof cape, and simply sit the storm out. Above all, don't panic. I know that in the middle of a bad electric storm one feels so alone and exposed, like a butterfly pinned to a blank wall, and the lightning seems to be malevolently trying to seek you out, but remember that the world is a big place, and you are only a tiny speck, and that the chances of your being hit, provided you heed the precautions listed above, are extremely small.

There are still two free-standing peaks in the Cathedral area that we have not dealt with yet, the Column (2 929 m) and Pyramid (2 926 m). These two peaks stand just below Cleft Peak, to the right as one is climbing Organ Pipes Pass. We have already described the climbing of the Column by George Thomson in Chapter 7. Ten months after his historic climb he was back on the peak, climbing it this time with Tobie Louw and Bill Curle on 31 October 1946. The first woman to climb the Column was Phyllis Goodwin, also in 1946. The peak was named in 1930 by that inveterate map-maker and namer of peaks, Professor Sweeney.

Pyramid, standing next to it, though easier to climb than the Column, still ranks as a difficult climb, and only the most expert mountaineers will tackle it. It was given its name in 1930, again by Professor Sweeney, while the first ascent was made six years later, in a most sensational climb. The party to achieve this "first" was a strong one. It consisted of Ken Howes-Howell from the Cape, Brian Godbold, Stan Rose, Charles Axelson, H.C. Hoets and Naomi Bokenham. They started their climb on the eastern ridge, traversed on to the north face, and reached the top at 1.25 pm. Here they lit a fire to announce their success to the rest of the Natal camp, gathered far below in the uMlambonje valley, and built the usual cairn of stones in which they left a record of their climb. When Doyle Liebenberg and his party climbed it for the second time in May 1941, they found that lightning had destroyed the record of this first ascent. The only sign left of the first climb was a fused aluminium container.

It was on the slopes of the Pyramid that young Michael Stephens, gifted son of H.B. Stephens, Conservator of Forests for Natal, met his tragic death on 29 December 1950. The party had already climbed the peak and were on their way down, when Michael slipped and fell 40 m, to be killed instantly.

He was not the first young man to meet his death in the mountains of the Cathedral Peak area. On 13 July 1942 a young man from the Belgian Congo, Louis Hellemans, fell to his death from just below the summit of the Outer Horn. He was standing near the edge, after having climbed

The first ascent of the Pyramid, 1936. From left: Ken Howes-Howell, Charles Axelson, Stan Rose, Naomi Bokenham, 'Hooter' Hoets Brian Godbold the Peak, and, not realising how close to the edge he was, stepped back and went over.

On 21 October 1947, Hans Otto Marcus fell from Baboon Rock, the large block of sandstone at the summit of Ganapu Ridge, immediately opposite the hotel. Climbing alone, he lost his way in the mist. The search party found him at the foot of the Rock with a broken back. Both men are buried in a small plot behind the hotel.

Then there was the accident that should never have happened. The Blue Pool is a favourite picnic spot up the uMlambonje valley, only a couple of kilometres from the hotel. The walk there is a pleasant one, and involves no climbing whatever. On 1 December 1953, Ralph Bollen, headmaster of Kensington South School, was walking along the path with his wife and a woman friend. He tripped over some object in the path, fell 5 m down a rocky decline, and died almost immediately.

Strangely this accident was repeated twice, in similar circumstances, 33 years later. On 16 September 1986, 60-year-old Margaret Cunningham fell about 10 m to her death at the same spot when the edge of the path gave way under her. A few weeks later a second woman fell, also at the same spot. Jacqueline Schlinder slipped and fell about 15 m from the path when she was attempting to negotiate an awkward section. She was still alive when foresters reached her with stretchers, but she died while being carried back to the hotel.

On 13 October 1959, it was again the turn of the Outer Horn to claim its victim. On the previous Saturday night, 10 October, two young girls had arrived at Cathedral Peak, Flelette van Zyl, a 19-year-old Public Service Department employee at Onderstepoort, and her friend Madge Rorke. That night they camped beside the river below the hotel, and on Sunday morning they set out for the Outer Horn. Taking it easy, they camped that night in the foothills below the peak. By midday both of them were pretty tired, but Flelette was anxious to push on. She told Madge that she would go on ahead, but that she would return about 2 pm. When she failed to turn up, Madge went on to look for her, but could not find her. Panic-stricken, she decided to go down immediately to the hotel for assistance. By now it was late, however, and she could not reach the hotel before dark. She slept out alone that night on the mountainside, and arrived at the hotel on the Wednesday morning.

Albert van der Riet immediately alerted the Bergville police, and two parties of police came out. Fortunately Stan Rose, an experienced mountaineer, who had been in Ken Howes-Howell's party on the Pyramid in 1936, was holidaying at Cathedral Peak, and he led a third party into the mountains to search for the missing girl. The three parties searched all day Wednesday, without success, but at 10 am on the Thursday morning Stan Rose's party found Flelette. She had fallen 100 m down the north-eastern face of the mountain, and had been killed instantly. A stretcher party was waiting on standby, and they brought the body down to within 6,5 km of the hotel, but now darkness was falling and the stretcher-bearers, who had been all day without food or water, were too exhausted to continue. The body had to be left out on the mountainside in the care of two police guards, and the journey back to the hotel completed the following day.

On 6 September 1970 yet another tragedy occurred, and the scene this time was the Bell. Three Natal University students, Ian William Dawson, Charles Barber and Carlos Freer, set out to climb the peak. Ian and Charles were roped together, but Carlos was not. Near the top of the climb, the two men who were roped together fell 60 m to their deaths[1].

The Natal Mountain Club Rescue Team, under Dr Sherman Ripley, was alerted on the Sunday morning, and they swung immediately into action. They were assisted by officials of the Natal Parks Board, the Police, and an Air Force helicopter. The recovery team consisted of altogether 20 men, and between them they brought the bodies down within 24 hours of the accident happening.

Sherman Ripley

It is a tragic tale of young lives lost, but it will be a sad day for South Africa when its sons and its daughters, its young men and women fail to respond to the challenge of danger. It is part of the price we pay in the making of men. And let it not be thought that any part of the Drakensberg, let alone Cathedral Peak, is dangerous for the careful holidaymaker. Every one of the accidents we have recounted above, with the possible exception of young Michael Stephens, was due to carelessness, foolhardiness or inexperience. Follow three golden rules: never go out alone (I admit I have not always followed this advice myself!), always have with you someone who is experienced and who knows the area, and always tell someone at home where you are going. The old club rule of the Natal Mountain Club prohibited parties of less than three. If one was injured there was always another to stay with him, while the third sought help. If you follow these simple rules you should come to no harm, and for many years to come you will be able to enjoy the beauty of the mountains in safety.

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[1] Two brothers, John and Paul Hone were watching the climb when the tragedy occurred. John ran for help.

The foothills of the Cathedral area are perhaps not as spectacular as the high peaks, but they are among the most beautiful in the whole Drakensberg. It is a land of clear mountain streams and age-old forests, of frothing cascades tumbling into pools of laughing water, of green mountain slopes and secret kloofs, of wild flowers and singing birds. The main river is the uMlambonje, rising in the angle formed by the Cathedral Range and the main Drakensberg. uMlambonje means the hungry dog. Thirty-two kilometres to the south, in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve, is a river called the Injisuthi. This means the well-fed dog. According to the Zulus, the game in the early days was plentiful in the Giant's Castle area, and the dogs were well fed. In the Cathedral area the game was scarce, and the dogs went hungry!

Beauty spots and picnic spots abound. One of the most beautiful is Rainbow Gorge, which is only about an hour's walk from the hotel. After 4,5 km the path enters a magnificent forest, and three-quarters of a kilometre further one of the loveliest pools in the district is encountered, fed by two waterfalls. Continue on, and about a kilometre further on you will enter a tremendous gorge, through which the river tumbles and roars. High up on the enclosing walls two gigantic chockstones have become wedged, stones that fell into the gorge who knows when, and have remained there for all time. Higher up still are some little-known Bushman paintings, including a unique one depicting a rope ladder stretched across what could well be the walls of the gorge.

Over the years I have grown to love the Cathedral area. It has meant more to me than merely the grandeur of the soaring peaks, the beauty of quiet valleys, and the green solitudes of age-old trees. To me these green solitudes and these forests are the hushed aisles of a great cathedral, and Cathedral Peak itself is the high altar from which the sounding winds deliver their message, the sermon that General Smuts once called "the Religion of the Mountains". Speaking at Maclear's Beacon on Table Mountain on 25 February 1923, when he dedicated the memorial to the mountaineers who had fallen in the Great War, he spoke these noble words:

> The sons of the cities are remembered and recorded in the streets and squares of their cities, and by memorials placed in their churches and cathedrals. But the mountaineers deserve a loftier pedestal and a more appropriate memorial. To them the true church where they worshipped was Table Mountain. Table Mountain was their cathedral where they heard a subtler music and saw wider visions and were inspired with a loftier spirit. Here in life they breathed the great air; here in death their memory will fill the upper spaces.
>
> We may truly say that the highest religion is the Religion of the Mountains ... the religion of joy, of the release of the soul from things that weigh it down and fill it with a sense of weariness, sorrow and defeat ...
>
> The mountains uphold us, and the stars beckon to us. The mountains of our lovely land will make a constant appeal to us to live the higher life of joy and freedom.

I wish someone had said this of our own Drakensberg Mountains!

Mountain Cathedral

"The mountains of our lovely land will make a constant appeal to us to live the higher life of joy and freedom." The Cathedral spur viewed from the Mnweni

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 12

CATHKIN

Champagne shall be my Castle gay,
Cathkin shall be my bed;
The Sentinel shall be my watch
And the Monk's Cowl clothe my head.
Song of the SA Mountain Club (Harry Barker)

If you take the footpath from the Cathedral Peak Hotel that leads up the valley of the Umhlonhlo towards Organ Pipes Pass, you will meet at about the 2 000 m contour level the Forestry Road running for about 12 km roughly east and west. This road used to be a section of the well-known Contour Path, built in 1937 by J. van Heyningen, the forester in charge of the Monk's Cowl Forest Station, to link up the Cathkin and Cathedral Peak areas. It kept roughly to the 2 000 m contour throughout its course, curving in and out of the great valleys that cut into the mighty escarpment of the Drakensberg. Since Van Heyningen's day it has been extended southward from Cathkin Peak, where it started, down into the Injisuthi area, and northward to a point under Cathedral Peak. The Natal Parks Board, on its part, started some years ago to build a similar path on the northern slopes of Giant's Castle, driving northwards. When these two paths meet there will be something like 200 km of well-graded pathway, stretching from Giant's Castle to Cathedral Peak, giving easy access to all the peaks that lie between these two points. (See maps on pages 368, 369 and 370).

Turn left along this Forestry road, and head east. You will enter, first of all, an area of grassland rehabilitation where once stood Forestry Department's plantations. Beyond that you will walk along pleasant slopes, until, 12,5 km after you enter the road, you will come out at the top of the Didima Gorge and valley, the road ends, and you are on the old Contour Path.

This is one of the finest of all the Drakensberg valleys, and from here the view is breathtaking. From far below, 400 m down, comes the restless thunder[1] of the Didima River as it enters the spectacular Gorge. The steep grass slopes are studded with wild flowers, and with enormous rocks, while away to your left is the green expanse of the Didima Forest, stretching right down to the hurrying waters of the river. To your right is the deep cut-back the river has made into the tremendous wall of the Drakensberg, with the Didima Dome (3 063 m) at its head.

This spectacular Gorge was almost certainly one of the last refuges of the Bushmen in the Drakensberg. It provides excellent cover, and is one of the remotest valleys in the whole area, far from human habitation. It is quite close to Eland Cave, which we shall refer to shortly. A large number of caves and paintings were discovered in this valley, particularly by Harald Pager, who made a special study of the Gorge.

Around it are the ageless peaks — the Witch (3 062 m), the Sphinx, Little Saddle and Sugarloaf. At the head of the Didima River, beneath the Dome, is a magnificent amphitheatre of rock walls, which narrow underneath the Dome into a vast crack, only a few metres wide. Below you, not far from where the path crosses the Didima, are two well-known Drakensberg caves, Sibayeni and Schoongezicht.

Above you is the lovely Thutumi valley, sweeping up to the Organ

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[1] The word Didima means, in Zulu, "the reverberating one".

Pipes. Looking down upon you, serene and aloof, is Little Saddle.

Now you have before you a long, long pull as you climb up out of the valley on the other side. For 8 km the path climbs up, getting higher and higher, until it comes out on the broad uplands below Eastman's Peak. This peak was named after H.A. ("Grandpa") Eastman, who was the first to reach the summit during the 1935 Natal Mountain Club Camp. "Grandpa" Eastman was a Cape climber. For many years he was Cape Town's Borough Electrical Engineer.

Black people in the Cathkin area still tell the story of the grim battle that was fought on the slopes of this mountain many years ago, between a regiment of Zulus and a band of Bushmen who had been raiding their cattle. The Bushmen were cornered on the slopes of this mountain. Their only retreat was upwards, and gradually they were forced back until they reached the summit. Here they made their stand. The Bushmen lay flat on their backs, and by putting their big toes through riempies (thongs) tied to the centre of the bow-stave, they were able to use both hands and discharge their arrows at great speed, high into the air, the arrows falling vertically on their attackers. The Zulus, terrified of the effects of these poisoned barbs, fled in terror, and the Bushmen were able to escape under cover of darkness into Lesotho.

An even more interesting story, with a touch of mystery, relates to a rather interesting find made in a cave in a small valley at the base of Eastman's Peak. Towards the end of June 1926, Dr Ernest Warren, director of the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, received a quaint letter from J.S. Lombard, brother of Anton Lombard, farming at Solar Cliffs in the Lower uMhlwazini valley. It read as follows:

> Dear Sir,
>
> A few days ago I find a whole Bushman outfitting Bow holster with a bow in it and a long wooden box with a lot of airos in it also a leather poison bag and two knives this things still in order it is very wonderful to see such old things — I find it in a cave on top of the Small Drakensberg Cathkin Peak as I want to sell it perhaps you will make me an offer for it or anybody else thats why I writing to you — hope you will please let me now by letter whats your opinion — I had a few offers already but it is worth that.

Sterkspruit Valley with Cathkin Peak and Sterkhorn in the background John Hone

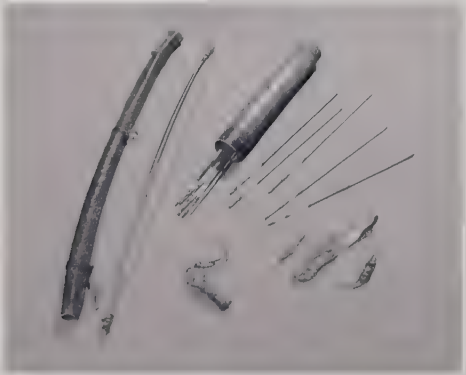
Dr Warren duly replied that the Natal Museum would be pleased to acquire the Bushman articles found. He asked for further details, and also asked Lombard to state his price. Lombard replied that he had already had offers of up to £10 from several museums as well as private persons, "but I like that these things go Direct to the Museum in the province where it is find. You can have it for the sum of £6 10s. Free on Rail".

And so the deal was concluded, and the £6 10s duly handed over. On receipt of the articles Dr Warren wrote again asking whether there were any paintings in the cave, and whether any search had been made for pieces of pottery, bone or metal ornaments. Lombard duly acknowledged receipt of the letter "about old bones and potterys and so on", and said that he had in fact located "a few bones and something else", which he would forward if Dr Warren wanted them. The "something else" turned out to be a portion of a bone armring.

In a third letter, Lombard wrote -

> I am sorry when I dick those things out I break it. I wonder if you could tell me what is this bengal of made Ivory or what? This cave have many nice paintings you can see they stayed a very long time in there. I couldn't find any whole potterys only broken pieces.

The complete find, as handed over to the museum, consisted of a bow, together with bow-case and quiver, 20 arrows, a curved metal blade inside a leather thong, a small leather case and a wooden spatula for applying poison to the arrows.



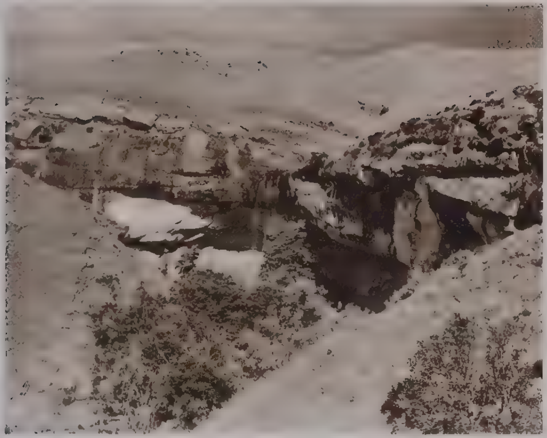
The Bushman hunting kit found at Eland Cave John Hone

And then the whole story came out. Lombard, hunting in the area, had discovered the cave in a small lateral tributary of the uMhlwazini, on the lower slopes of Eastman's Peak. It was about 90 m long, 6 m deep, and contained over 1 000 individual paintings, of the most exquisite artistry. Among them was a picture of an eland nearly a metre in length. Hunting around the cave, Lombard had climbed up to a ledge of rock, about 1,2 m wide and about 4 m above the level of the floor. Here he had found the Bushman hunting kit, all in a perfect state of preservation.

But it was the angle on the find supplied by W. Carter Robinson that lifted it into the realm of mystery. Robinson was farming at the time in the Sterkspruit valley, at Deelpunt, at the foot of Cathkin, and he visited the cave a few days after Lombard had discovered it. Climbing up to the ledge, Robinson realised that it was in fact a Bushman's sleeping quarters. In front was a low wall of piled up stones and inside was a layer of grass, which looked as if it had been cut only four to six months previously. Who had built that tiny shelter in one of the remotest caves of the Drakensberg? Who had cut that grass? And to whom did those bows and arrows belong? Is it possible that even as late as 1926 a few isolated Bushmen still remained in the Drakensberg? It seems hardly credible, but how otherwise can those well-preserved bows and arrows, and that recently used sleeping place be explained? Harald Pager, who made a special study of the Didima Gorge and of this particular cave, said that it was not impossible. He pointed out that even now one could walk for days in these parts without seeing another soul, and that if one wanted to avoid people, it would not be difficult to do so, for weeks or months, perhaps even for years.

Today these relics of an ancient past, which may have lived on into the twentieth century, are preserved in the Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg, and the cave is known variously as Makambi Cave, Eland Cave, or Lombard's Cave.

The path still proceeds southwards, along one of the loneliest stretches in the Drakensberg. Then, suddenly, you come out high above the valley of the Nkosazana, another of the great valleys of the Drakensberg. Far below you, as with the Didima, the river croons its ancient song as it hurries through the valleys of the Little Berg. On the other side the path clings to the slopes of Gatberg. If you could walk across in a straight line you would do it in 15 minutes, but before you have traversed the downward slope, crossed the river at the bottom, and climbed the far slope, two long hours will have sped by.



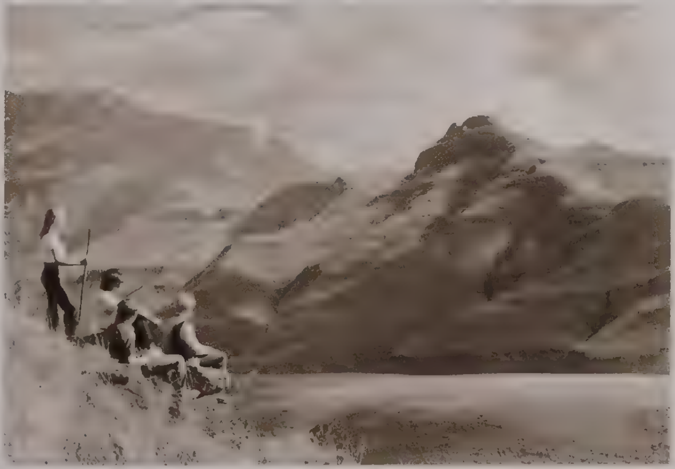
Eland Cave Malcolm Pearse

It was in the upper reaches of the Nkosazana, near to where the path crosses the river, that cinnabar was "discovered" in the early 1920s. Cinnabar is a red mercuric sulphide, and is the common ore from which mercury, or quicksilver, is derived. It is usually found in an earthy form of bright red colour. And here, certainly, were the red earths, perhaps of a slightly purplish tinge, but undoubtedly red. And the assessors had been handed small quantities of what was undoubtedly quicksilver. Soon the wildest stories were being told in the pubs of Winterton, Bergville and Estcourt. One enthusiastic farmer even claimed that he could hear the mercury dripping on to the ground inside a crevice he had discovered! Prospectors from Estcourt, Bergville and Winterton, and even further afield, moved in to stake their claims and make their fortunes. For months they lived and toiled in the mountains. Supplies were brought in by donkey, up the slopes of the Little Berg, and across the plateau of the Nkosazana. The remains of the tracks, in the Cathkin area, and up the Brotherton headland in the Cathedral area, are still to be seen, as are the holes that the prospectors dug. But alas! The original "finds" had been salted, and the red earth was nothing more than outcrops from the Elliot Formation (Red Beds). The prospectors soon departed, angry and disillusioned. Those who took part in the "rush" were reluctant to divulge the name of the suspect who started the rumour. A veil of secrecy has been drawn over the whole affair, for the suspect's family still lived in the district, and people just weren't talking!

Gatberg (2 408 m) is the mountain with a hole bored right through it, near the summit. From below this hole looks quite small, only a few metres across, but it is in fact enormous. The Zulu name is iNtunja, meaning the eye of a needle. There is another mountain in Natal with a hole right through it. This is the well-known Kranskop, near Greytown. Actually at one time there were two holes — one has since fallen in — and the Zulu name for this peak is iNtunjambili, the "mountain with two holes".

In the tally of Drakensberg accidents perhaps the strangest of all can be claimed by Gatberg. On Monday, 13 September 1937, R. Stuart Armstrong and T.H. Archbell left Kroonstad in a Hornet Moth light plane to fly to Durban. Armstrong was the owner of Armstrong's Garage on Durban Beach, and the 21-year-old Archbell, who was piloting the plane, was a member of one of Natal's oldest families, a great-grandson of the missionary James Archbell. Both men were keen and fully qualified pilots.

They set off at 6.40 am, but over the Drakensberg they ran into heavy mist, lost their way, and at 8.15 am crash-landed on the slopes of Gatberg. As young Archbell saw the ground looming up through the mist, a couple of metres below him, he had the presence of mind to put the left rudder full over, tipping the plane so that the right wing would take the impact and not the front of the machine. This saved them from serious injury. Armstrong was thrown clear and sustained



The uMhlwazini valley and iNtunja Malcolm Pearse a gash across the forehead and eye. Archbell was uninjured. The plane, however, was badly smashed up. Surrounded by heavy mist, they had not the faintest idea where they were, except that their altimeter, which read 7 000 feet (2 134 m), indicated that they must be somewhere in the Drakensberg. They spent the remainder of the day and the following night in the plane.

Next day, with no signs of life around them, they climbed the slopes of Gatberg, and with the mist beginning to clear, they spotted, 10 km to the north, far down the valley of the uMhlwazini, and on its right bank, a small plantation of gum trees, which indicated a homestead[1]. They decided to head for this, and at 9.30 am began the long descent into the valley of the uMhlwazini.

Meanwhile an extensive air search for the missing plane had been mounted. Nothing could be done on the Monday, owing to the heavy mist, but on the Tuesday a number of planes took off from Durban. Among them was a Hornet Moth piloted by Captain Noel J.O. Carbutt, head of Natal Aviation, with a Natal Mercury reporter on board. They could not see Cathkin Peak, still shrouded in mist and rain, as they flew past, so decided to fly on to Ladysmith.

Here they had lunch, but during lunch the weather cleared, and at 3 pm they set off again, planning to search the area between Cathedral Peak and Cathkin.

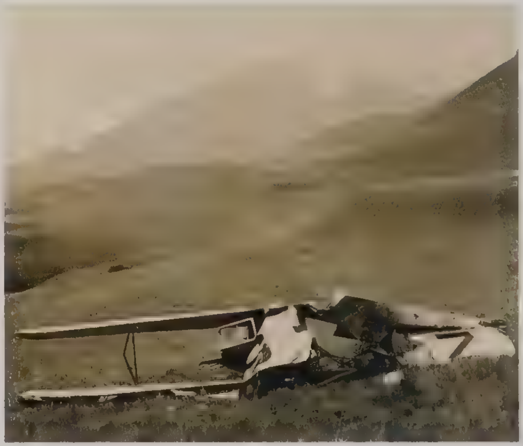
It was the reporter who first spotted the plane. Far down, on the slopes of Gatberg, he caught a gleam of something which he at first took to be an iron shed. Closer inspection, however, revealed a crimson line between the two crossed greyish-silver arms. "It's the plane!" yelled the reporter above the roar of the engine. And the plane it was, though there was no sign of life around it. They headed straight back for Stamford Hill, Durban's first aerodrome, from where they immediately telephoned Cathkin Park Hotel with the news. It was now 5.30 pm.

At the hotel Otto Zunckel, his two sons and a number of other men were busy making plans for an extensive ground search for the following day. At almost the same moment that the telephone message came through, Madolawana, a guide, came galloping up to the hotel on horseback. *"Ngilitholile ibanoyi ngale kweNtunja!"* he shouted ("I have found the aeroplane behind Gatberg!"). Then breathlessly he told his story. He had ridden up to within 10 m of the wreck, and shouted. There was no reply, and, afraid to approach closer to where there might be dead men, alone in the middle of the mountains, he had galloped on to Cathkin Hotel to tell them what he had seen.

"Almost certainly dead," said Otto Zunckel. "Still, there's just a chance we may be able to save life. We must leave immediately."

They set off after dark, a party of 25 men, with Otto Zunckel in the lead. Up the long steep Jacob's Ladder they went, in single file, with the moon trying to shine through the clinging mist, up to the summit of the Little Berg, down into the uMhlwazini, and up the other side, stumbling, falling and cursing in the darkness. One of the party fell down a krantz and gashed his head severely.

At last, close to midnight, they found the red and silver wreck on the lower slopes of Gatberg. Some of the men, fearing the worst, approached it with raised hats. The starboard wing was smashed, the engine had been ripped from the frame, and was lying some distance away, the



The wreck of the plane from which Armstrong and Archbell walked. Note the wing fabric, which the airmen used to keep out the cold, covering the cockpit Natal Mercury undercarriage was crushed, but the cabin itself was intact. And there was no sign of the men! Nor was there any blood, apart from a small smear on a pair of overalls. An examination of the interior revealed how the airmen had adopted every possible means to protect themselves from the bitter cold at this 2 134 m altitude by stuffing every crevice and gap in the cabin with socks, paper, gauntlets and odds and ends. To cover the front of the cabin, where the engine had broken away, they had torn the fabric from one of the wings and tied it securely inside the cabin. There were also the remains of a meal. The men were obviously alive, but where were they?

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[1] The homestead, on the farm The Climb, belonged to the Vermeulens, and is immediately opposite Lombard's homestead on the farm Solar Cliffs, in the uMhlwazini valley, 4 km above the junction of the uMhlwazini and the uMlambonje.

Actually, at that moment they were safe and sound in their beds at a lonely farmhouse, 10 km away.

Aerial view of Cathkin Peak, Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle on the right Malcolm Pearse

After leaving the plane on the Tuesday morning, they first of all had the surprise of their lives when they ran into a Forest Guard, and were promptly arrested for being in the Forest Reserve without a permit! This seemed a heaven-sent opportunity of reaching civilisation, even if it did mean being in the clutches of the law, but when Mantish, the guard, heard their story, he agreed to let them go. The farm towards which they were heading (which he told them belonged to a Mrs Vermeulen) was much nearer than the Monk's Cowl Forest Station, to which he had intended taking them.

The men then continued down the uMhlwazini valley, past the junction of the Didima, and arrived at Mrs Vermeulen's farm at 2 pm. Mrs Vermeulen and her daughter, terrified at first at the sight of two grim-looking strangers with their clothes covered in oil[1], soon realised the plight they were in, and took them in for the night. Next morning the two men continued down the valley to a point where the present Cathedral road crosses the uMhlwazini. Here they met a mule cart, which Mrs Vermeulen had arranged for them, and from there they proceeded to Bergville.

Later Gert Martens, brother of Hendrik Martens who started the Champagne Castle Hotel, was given the contract to bring down the wreckage of the plane. He brought down the engine and other parts of value on the back of a donkey, but for many years the frame still lay on the mountainside, below and quite near to the present Contour Path.

Climbing up round the shoulder of Gatberg, you look down into yet another magnificent valley, the valley of the uMhlwazini. High on

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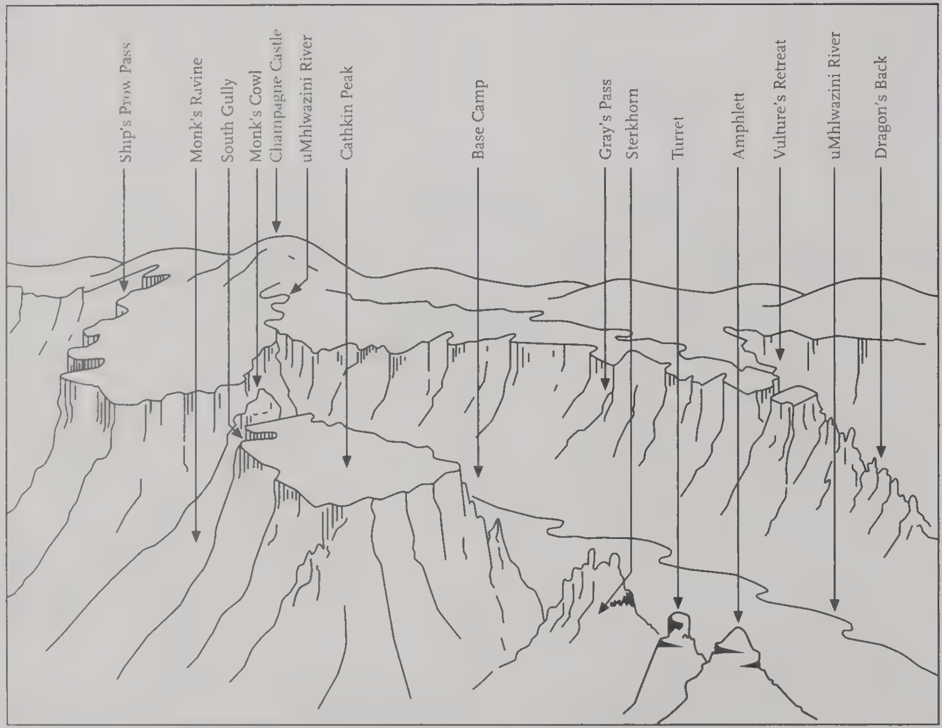
[1] The Vermeulens were recluses. Whenever visitors came to the valley the whole family would run off and hide.



Sketch of Cathkin area, looking north-west

the opposite slope is Hlathikhulu Nek, the gateway to the valley of the Sterkspruit, to Cathkin Peak, and Champagne Castle.

Champagne Castle itself (3 377 m) is a rounded dome, set very slightly inland, and the second highest point on the escarpment. It is not particularly impressive, but it is ringed by mighty cliffs on two sides. At only one point are these cliffs breached, by a gully known as Gray's Pass, slightly to the north-west of the source of the uMhlwazini.

The most feasible way of climbing Champagne Castle is to proceed over Hlathikhulu Nek (if one sets off from any of the Berg hotels in the area), turn left up the valley of the uMhlwazini to Base Camp, immediately under the final wall of the Drakensberg, and then climb up the steep slopes in front of you, and so into Gray's Pass and up to the summit. It is a climb that can be done by the beginner, so long as he has two strong legs and plenty of stamina. No rock work at all is involved, apart from the very easy rock in the pass itself. Champagne Castle was first climbed, traditionally, by Major Grantham in 1861, while the first authenticated and recorded climb went to the Stocker brothers in 1888.

Cathkin Peak (3 149 m) is a very different proposition. It is a huge, free-standing block of a mountain, and is one of the most prominent landmarks in the whole of the Drakensberg. Stupendous cliffs ring all four sides of the mountain, but on the south face there is a fairly broad gully, which makes a deep indent into the symmetrical face of the giant. It is filled in with rock ledges and slopes of debris on its right side, and with steep rock faces on its left side. This offers the only feasible route to the summit. Even so, it is a climb that can only be undertaken by a team of experienced mountaineers. For nearly 50 years it drew climbers eager to be the first to breach its virgin inviolability. We have already referred to several isolated episodes in these attempts. The time has come to tell the full story.

First to set foot on the upper slopes of the peak were the Stocker brothers, although it is possible that earlier, unrecorded, attempts had been made, for the South Gully was already known in 1888 when the Stockers made their attempt.

On 12 August 1888 they moved into the South Gully and commenced climbing. They finally reached an altitude of 2 995m[1] with 154 m still to go, but here they were confronted by what appeared to be an unclimbable wall, and as their time was running out, they decided to retreat. Three months later they were back for a second attempt, but bad weather and transport trouble defeated them, and this time they did not even reach the South Gully.

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[1] This height has been adjusted. Their altimeter actually read 10 120 ft (3 085 m), but it was about 90 m out.

In November 1909 Mr and Mrs G.T. Amphlett made a reconnaissance of the peak. They attempted to climb the north-east ridge, but the weather turned against them and they too had to give up.

Between 1888 and 1911 there must have been a number of attempts at climbing the peak, of which we know nothing. W.C. West, who was one of the six men who finally climbed it in 1912, said that the officers of various regiments stationed in the vicinity often tried to scale the peak. As we shall see, an attempt was definitely made in 1909, by two Cape Town climbers and a Durban man, but we know nothing of the details of this effort.

The next attempt of which we have a definite record was made by Wybergh in 1911, when he spent the night high up in the South Gully, a night bivouac we have already described in Chapter 6. The party consisted of Mr and Mrs W.J. Wybergh and Colonel J.P.S. Woods. They approached the mountain from the south. Wybergh and Woods first ascended the slopes of Champagne Castle to the left of Monk's Ravine. (Monk's Ravine is a deeply incised southern gully that runs up to the base of Monk's Cowl, between Champagne Castle and Cathkin Peak.) From here they could look into the South Gully, but were rather doubtful of it, so they climbed up the Ravine to the base of Monk's Cowl, went down the other side into the uMhlwazini, and explored the north-west face, without any success, however.

Next day Woods was suffering from mountain sickness, so Wybergh made an attempt on the South Gully, accompanied by his Zulu guide, Nongale. High on the slopes of Cathkin they found a cairn of stones, inside which was a tin containing a card inscribed with the following words:

> August 1, 190?
> D.O. Reynish, Mountain Club, Cape Town
> John S. Mann of Durban
> A. Beevers, Cape Town

The date was indistinct, and might have been 1907 or 1909. I traced the families of two of these men, and in a rather strange way they were able to clear up the matter of the date. I received letters from Eve Reynish, David Owen Reynish's daughter-in-law, and also from D. Beevers, Allan Beevers' son. The two Cape Town men had been booked to return to the Cape by sea, but due to their Cathkin climb had missed the boat they were booked on. And the name of the boat? The *Waratah*! She sailed from Durban on 26 July 1909 without them, and disappeared at sea with all hands, a mystery which has never been cleared up.

As we have seen, Wybergh, like the Stockers before him, after climbing well up the South Gully, failed at the final pitch, this time owing to the Gully being iced up. Unlike the Stockers, however, he spent the night in the Gully.

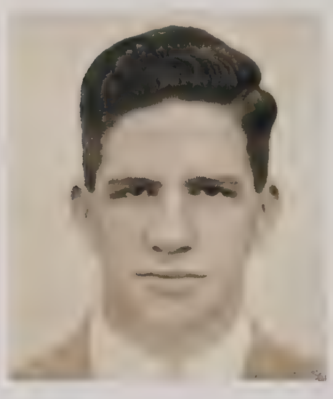
Finally in 1912 a very determined attempt was made to climb the peak. A strong team of climbers assembled at Colonel J.P.S. Woods' farm Heartsease. It consisted of W.C. West and G.T. Amphlett from Cape Town, and Amphlett's servant, Tobias. Father Kelly, the indomitable climber mentioned in previous chapters, came from Bloemfontein. He and Tom Casement rode down from Rydal Mount with the faithful Melatu, over 160 km in two days. They left Woods' farm on the morning of 10 September, camped for the night at the foot of the mountain, and reached Monk's Ravine at 11.30 am on the following day. Here, although the account is not very clear, they must have spent the night.

Next day, 12 September, they climbed Monk's Ravine, where they saw the cairn and card that Wybergh had discovered a year previously. A little further up they found another bottle, with a note inside, which read: "Take the ice-slope to the right. Then up the gorge, and away to the left and up the Peak. You will have a jolly good view, even if you have to go home without climbing Cathkin Peak. George Scott, Colin S. Nunn, August 1st, 1912."

Then they entered the gully and climbed steadily for several hours. When they came to the last difficult pitches, which had defeated the Stockers and Wybergh, they at first decided to leave Melatu and Tobias behind, but they were both good climbers, and were so obviously disappointed at being left behind, that eventually they decided to take the two up with them. Climbing slowly now, and with infinite care, the six men made their way steadily up the final precipices and reached the top at 2.20 pm.

It had previously been considered that Cathkin Peak was higher than Champagne Castle, but when they reached the summit it was obvious that both Champagne Castle and Monk's Cowl were higher than Cathkin Peak. Their aneroid gave a height of 3 200 m. The actual height is 3 149 m.

We have already told the story of the second ascent, made by Londt in July 1921. Up to 1955 the only accepted route up Cathkin had been the South Gully, but on 20 September 1955, A. Leeb du Toit, Keith Frank Holderness Bush and N.D. Harte climbed the north face for the first time. It taxed their powers to the utmost, the climb terminating in a 100 m chimney, very wet, slippery and dangerous in the rainy months, but quite feasible in the drier months.



Keith Bush

But the climb ended in tragedy. While abseiling down the sheer cliff face the sling attached to the rope holding Keith Bush broke, and he hurtled hundreds of metres to his death. Keith was a most promising Natal University student, son of Professor Frank Bush, also of the University. Among the many letters received by his parents at the time of the accident, was this moving tribute from one who knew Keith well:

> At the hour of his tragic death Keith had no idea of impending disaster. He was with friends and fellow-students in the mountains he so loved, and with them he had just achieved a difficult and hazardous climb. He had done something worthwhile and he must have been filled with a sense of accomplishment for the brief time he and his comrades remained on the top of the conquered peak (Cathkin) and surveyed the scene spread out before and below them. Must not that have been a glorious moment! And in that moment, with no sense of pain or danger, he passed on.

His memory was enshrined in the Keith Bush Hut, in the upper reaches of the uMhlwazini valley, just below the spot where he met his death, but when, in 1973, this was declared part of the Mdedelelo Wilderness Area, it had to be demolished.

Cathkin Peak was named after David Gray's farm Cathkin, a name he had obtained from Cathkin Braes, near Glasgow, his home city. David Gray, it will be remembered, had settled in the area in 1858. The full story of the naming of Cathkin Peak and Champagne Castle, has been told in Chapter 4. The Zulu name for Cathkin is Mdedelelo, meaning "make room for him". It is usually applied to a bully who pushes everyone else out of his way[1].

Between Cathkin and Champagne Castle is Monk's Cowl (3 234 m), a peak which has caught the imagination of people to a greater extent, possibly, than any other Drakensberg peak. This is possibly due to its inaccessibility (tucked away behind Cathkin it is seldom seen by the ordinary tourist), to the fact that for many years it was listed as unclimbable, and also because it was the scene of the first fatal climbing accident in the Drakensberg. Cathkin is a huge, solid block of a mountain: Champagne is a rounded dome: Monk's Cowl is sharp and pointed, like an upthrust fang, and there is something almost sinister and menacing about its lowering precipices. Hans Wong who finally conquered it in 1942, spoke of its "cold, fascinating beauty". It was a challenge that few mountaineers could resist.

Who named it is not known. The name goes back as far as 1912, so it was not one of the peaks named by the Natal Mountain Club. The Stockers knew it in 1888, but not as Monk's Cowl. They knew it as iNkosana, meaning a petty chief, obviously the Zulu name for it.

There is an unconfirmed tradition that Father Kelly had attempted to climb the north-east face round about 1914. Many others must at least have taken a look at it, only to be repelled by those towering black precipices. George Londt made a brief reconnaissance of it in 1921. Londt seldom believed a route impossible, but after his visit he said he doubted very much whether the peak would ever be climbed. Few mountaineers could resist its lure, however, and the story of the various attempts to climb it make up one of the finest epics of Natal mountaineering. Only two of the six attempts I shall describe succeeded, but what of that! It was the unending effort, the cool courage, the refusal to accept defeat, the iron nerve of the men who made these attempts that counted, and in that respect not one was a failure.

In January 1938 the first serious attempt at climbing the peak, since

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[1] S. Bourquin suggests that the more likely meaning is "He who wears out with fatigue": *dedelele*, referring to mental or physical fatigue.

Dick Barry

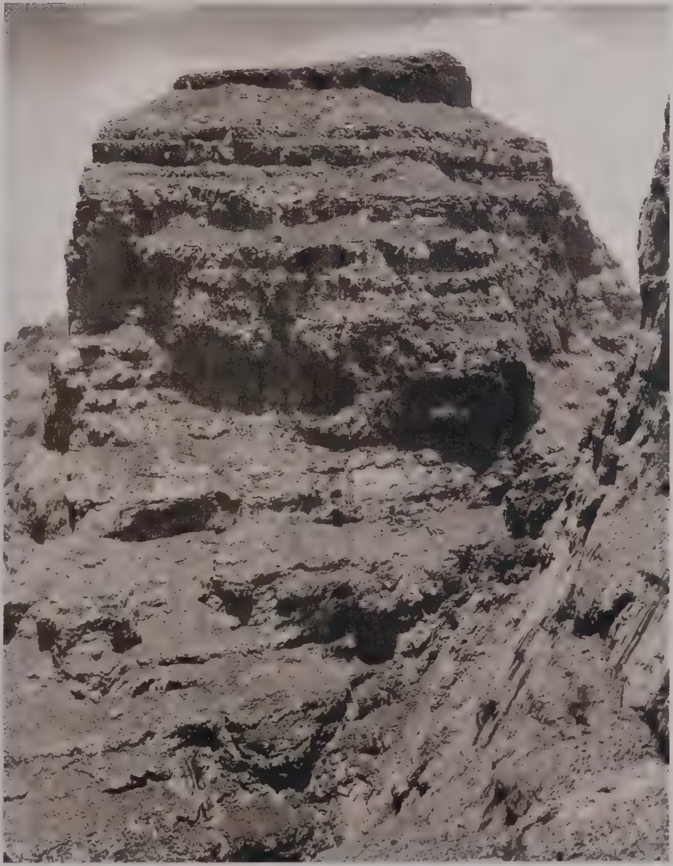
Father Kelly's possible attempt in 1914, was made by Dick Barry and Colin Gebhardt. We have already referred to Barry's magnificent record, in Chapter 6. I shall tell the story of their attempt in Gebhardt's own words:

We arrived at Cathkin Hostel on the 28th January 1938, obtained permission from the forestry ranger to camp out in the mountains, and left the same day, arriving at the foot of Cathkin Gully that afternoon. [Note: Cathkin Gully is the gully running up from the uMhlwazini to Monk's Cowl, and is the counterpart of Monk's Ravine on the other side of the mountain. The men were approaching the nek between Cathkin and Monk's Cowl from the north: the Cathkin attempts of 1911 and 1912 had been made from the south of this nek.] We pitched our camp, and decided to start our climb early next morning.

At about 6 o'clock the next morning, the 29th, when we woke up, the weather was unsuitable, with heavy mist and light rain. However, at half past seven it cleared up and it seemed to be a lovely day, so we decided after all to give it a trial. We left at about 8 o'clock from our base camp, each carrying a rucksack, with a few provisions, a spare rope or two and a few pitons. It must have been just after nine by the time we had slogged up to the top of the gully between Monk's Cowl and Cathkin. Again it started raining. Dick had a type of portable oilskin tent with him. The two of us managed to get under this and thus kept comparatively dry. We must have sat there for quite an hour. Anyway, as soon as it cleared up we pushed on again, making a fairly long traverse to the right.

Then started our first rock work, about "D" standard. This we did without much bother. Then we started the real rock work. We did the first pitch, about fifty feet of "E" standard, then a fairly long grassy stretch and two or three more rock pitches with these grassy slopes between.

Then came the final rock assault. This we judged, if I remember correctly, to be about four hundred feet. I remember Dick remarking that if we managed that, then there would be only about a hundred feet or so of scrambling to the top. Dick went on ahead. He was in good climbing form, not that I had ever seen him otherwise. He went up about sixty feet to where he found the first stance. Unfortunately there was no form of belay he could use other than a shoulder, or hip belay. He pulled up the two rucksacks, one at a time. Then he threw the rope to me. I started climbing. It was very difficult work, more difficult than I had judged from the ease with which Dick did it, and it was extremely sensational. There was about a thousand-foot drop to the left of us. I judged this pitch to be about a double star "E" standard, similar to the "Red Corner" climb that Dick and I opened



Monk's Cowl, western face. The route attempted by Barry and Gebhardt is towards the left of the picture

Malcolm Pearse

> up at Tonquani. Up on my way I went and I completed the climb to within two feet of Dick. I still remember his smile and his saying "Good climbing, Gebby". I remember putting my right hand out, taking hold of a handhold so as to keep my balance and wanting to take a step up next to Dick so that he could carry on with the next pitch. As I took a step, my handhold came out, a rock weighing about 6 lb. I lost my balance and down I went.
>
> Dick, being quite unprepared for anything like that, couldn't hold me, so of course after I had fallen the length of the rope, I jerked him off the stance. Down he went, dropped this first pitch of about sixty feet, rolled down a slope, dropped down another twenty feet, rolled another slope, dropped another pitch of about thirty feet, and came to rest close to the edge of another fifty-foot pitch. We weren't very badly hurt then, though Dick was unconscious. The time must have been about 3 o'clock. My leg was badly bruised and one finger hurt. Dick had a cut on his head. I happened to have a bandage in my pocket, so I bandaged his head and did the best I could for him until he regained consciousness, about two hours later. He was then quite cheerful, complained a bit about a headache, and was in fact more concerned about me than about himself. We knew then that our attempt had failed, so we decided to start the descent. We had only one difficult pitch to overcome; then the rest of the descent would have been comparatively easy.

They were now, however, in a dreadful predicament. They had no spare rope, their rucksacks, pitons and other climbing gear had been left behind at the point from where they had fallen, they were alone and badly shaken on the precipices of a hitherto unclimbed mountain, and night was coming on. It was a situation enough to shake the nerve of the stoutest climber. Colin Gebhardt continues his account:

> I was then in a better condition than Dick, so I was to act as leader and belay Dick down this fifty-foot pitch. He tried, and tried — had about five attempts to get down — but I suppose owing to his condition then, he couldn't make it. Then he decided that I should go down. He tried again and again and again, but couldn't get himself to do it. Then he decided that he would look around and see if he couldn't find an easier way down. I called to him and besought him to come back because I knew there was no other way down.
>
> Well, he went. Away to my left I lost sight of him, but could hear him answering my calls every now and then. Then suddenly no more answers. I knew immediately Dick was dead. God knows how I did, but I knew. If he had fallen I knew just about where I would find him. I started on my way down and around that way. My leg was painful and the going slow. Then it got too dark to go on. I went into a little cave we saw on our way up. There I waited for daylight to come. As soon as it was light enough I continued on. I found Dick's body just about where I had expected. He was dead. I tried to carry him, but was too exhausted to lift him, so I had to leave him and go for help ...

Gebhardt's dash down the mountainside for help is an epic in itself. Bruised, dazed, maimed and drenched, after a night alone high up on those staggering precipices, and with the knowledge that his friend was dead, he managed to get down off the mountain and into the valley of the uMhlwazini. He had been without food for 24 hours, his boots were gone, for they had climbed in stockinged feet, and all his warm clothing had been left behind. For 20 km he staggered on, over rough mountain tracks and down the boulder-strewn course of the uMhlwazini River, until on the point of collapse, late on Sunday morning, he stumbled into Cathkin Park Hotel with the news of the tragedy.

Again it was Otto Zunckel and his two sons, Udo and Gerald who took charge of the rescue party. Within half an hour of Gebhardt's arrival they were off on the long climb up the Little Berg, into the valley of the uMhlwazini, and up to Base Camp. They arrived at the foot of Monk's Cowl late on Sunday evening, but that night heavy rain came down, and it rained steadily all the next day as well.

Conditions in the relief camp were indeed grim that Sunday night and Monday. Torrents of rain fell, and it was bitterly cold. They had no blankets, and their food ran out. So bitter was the weather that all the members of the rescue party crowded into the one small tent. Tuesday the weather was equally bad, but on the Wednesday an attempt could be made to reach the body. It was Udo Zunckel who found it, wedged face upwards between two huge rocks. The eyes were open, facing the peak. Almost every bone in the body was broken. It was placed in a sack, lowered by rope down two steep cliffs, and so on to a grassy slope. Here it was placed on a stretcher, and the march home began with relays of bearers.

On the Thursday morning at 10 am a simple burial service conducted by Canon Harker of Estcourt was held on the slopes of the Little Berg near Cathkin Park Hotel, at the only point where the tip of Monk's Cowl can be seen. The headstone was a block of Drakensberg sandstone, and the grave faced Monk's Cowl. The inscription reads:

Richard Vincent Merriman
BARRY
who gave his life to the
mountains he loved
MONK'S COWL
Jan. 29th, 1938
Aged 22 years
I will lift up mine eyes unto the
hills from whence cometh my help

Harry Barker, Dick's friend and climbing companion, who had come down from Johannesburg to help in the recovery of the body, said of him afterwards: "His death was a tragedy in the noblest sense, for it was his very virtue — his courage — which was the cause of it. But not in vain did he live and die, for his spirit lives among his friends, and his memory will inspire them."

Dick Barry and Colin Gebhardt had attacked the north-west face of the peak. Nearly 15 years later, in May 1952, two other young climbers also found themselves on the same north-west face of the peak, right on Barry's route, though they did not know it. Des Watkins, well-known Natal climber, and Gillian Bettle, were attempting a new route on the inscrutable peak, which as we shall shortly recount, had already been conquered 10 years previously. After climbing a ledge at about the 3 000 m mark, they turned a corner and suddenly came across a rucksack tucked into a crevice. It was Barry's and after getting over the shock of finding someone else's rucksack hidden so high up in the clouds, they suddenly realised that they were on Barry's route, and that this was as far as he had got.

Des Watkins with Dick Barry's climbing gear retrieved from Monk's Cowl

Arthur Bowland

It was at this point that Watkins himself slipped and fell, at almost the same spot that Barry had fallen. He fell about 15 m and cracked several ribs, so the two had to give up. Five months later, however, Watkins was back, determined to reach the rucksack and clear up its mystery. This time he had with him G. Cairns and T. Norcott. Climbing steadily, they reached the same spot. The rucksack was still there. After nearly 15 years it was in bad condition, but its contents had been well preserved in that high, dry spot, so inaccessible that even the baboons had been unable to reach it. Inside the rucksack they found some butter in a plastic jar. Though rancid, it was still edible. A pair of trousers was still quite wearable, and a camera was in good condition. There was also a pair of climbing boots, a coil of rope, rubber tennis shoes, and a piton, all in nearly as good condition as when last used. Most pathetic of the contents was a small note inside, signed by Barry and Gebhardt. So confident had they been of reaching the top, that they had prepared the note beforehand, intending to leave it inside the cairn they would have built on the summit, and which was never to be theirs. The three men brought the gear down safely, and the film in the camera was sent off to be developed. However, when processed, the film revealed nothing of interest.

Malcolm Moor

Malcolm Pearse

This north-west face, which Dick Barry and Des Watkins had both found impossible, was finally conquered in 1962 in a dramatic climb by Martin Winter, Malcolm Moor and M. Makowski. It included a pitch of 3,5 m which took three and a half hours to climb, and a spine-tingling hand traverse, with legs dangling over an overhang.

But to go back. The tragic death of Dick Barry added yet another facet to the challenge of the peak. Men were even more determined to climb it.

In 1939 John Langmore, who had often climbed with Barry, led a most determined and carefully prepared assault on the west face. No one could have led the climb with greater skill and courage than Langmore, but this assault also failed, largely due to the weather. Heavy snow fell, and thick mist closed in. The pitches and the chimneys were all iced up, and the cold was bitter. There was only one thing for it — retreat.

All the attempts so far had shown the near impossibility of climbing the northern and north-western faces. In 1942 Hans Wong decided to have a go at the southern face. He persuaded three other Transvaal men to go with him, Jackie Botha, Emile Ruhle and Tony Hooper. As they approached Champagne Castle Hotel in their car, a devastating storm broke over them. Trees were uprooted; the front of the car was lifted bodily into the air by a tremendous gust of wind; a nearby house collapsed like a pack of cards. It was almost as if the guardian spirits of uKhahlamba were making a last desperate effort to protect the inviolability of the virgin peak.

Next morning, Sunday 10 May 1942, they left the hotel and headed for the uMhlwazini valley and Base Camp. Arrived there, they climbed the treacherous gully between Cathkin and Monk's Cowl, reaching the nek, and the base of the mountain, at midday. From there they traversed round the base of the mountain on to the nek between Monk's Cowl and Champagne Castle. They slept the night in a small cave in the nek, in sub-zero temperatures, with great chunks of ice all round them. They had to pile on every stitch of clothing they had.

Next morning dawned a perfect winter's morning — bitterly cold but bracing. They started to climb at 7.30 am, building, first, a beacon to show the start of the route. It was so cold that they had to climb wearing all the clothing they had. Three difficult pitches ended in a long traverse to the left over sloping slabs. The fourth pitch was an easy D standard, but the fifth pitch was tricky, 10 m of badly sloping rock. Then followed several quite easy pitches, leading to a really difficult one, 20 m of tough E star. But now the summit was not far off. One final krantz, and they were on top. It was 10.30 am. They built a tremendous beacon, abseiled down, and the climb was over — the peak at last had been conquered.

Back at the hotel, Oom Hendrik Martens, the proprietor, flatly refused to believe the great news, claiming that the climb was impossible. Next day he secretly sent his young nephew up Champagne Castle to confirm the beacon. It was only when the young man returned with the news that there was indeed a beacon on the summit of the peak, that old Oom Hendrik would believe the news.

To return to Dick Barry, how was it that, expert climber as he was, experienced, with an impressive series of first ascents to his credit, he had allowed himself to get into a position on the Cowl which led to his death? I put the question to Harry Barker who knew Dick well and had often climbed with him. Dick, said Barker, was impetuous. He liked to climb fast. He hated the long waits while other climbers in a team were being brought up. Dick always climbed, therefore, with a minimum of companions. On the day he died he climbed with only one. Supremely confident in himself, he did not worry to anchor himself properly to the rock when he was belaying Gebhardt. The result was that when Gebhardt fell, Barry, alone, could not hold him, and was jerked off his stance. Both men fell, Barry sustaining grave injuries. Dazed and shaken by the fall, even his iron nerve and superb skill failed him, and he fell to his death.

Whatever the reason, we can but salute a very fine, and very gallant climber.

Next to Cathkin stands the pyramid-shaped Sterkhorn (2 973 m). Sterkhorn has two summits: Sterkhorn North and Sterkhorn South. Sterkhorn North is slightly lower than Sterkhorn South, and is very easily climbed. Sterkhorn South is a much more difficult proposition. It was first climbed, as we have seen, by the Stocker brothers in 1888, after two unsuccessful attempts. In 1947 Sterkhorn was adopted by the Moth organisation as a National War Memorial, a cross erected on the summit of the North peak (it shines when the sun is at a particular angle on it), and the mountain renamed Mount Memory. The name has not caught on, however.

The next peak on this miniature range is the Turret, which is much lower than Sterkhorn. It is a small, rectangular block, with vertical sides, but not too difficult to negotiate. It was first climbed during the 1933 July Camp by F.E. (Tom) Ellis and Brian Godbold, and named Tamma's Tower, Tamma being a corruption of Tom. The name, however, faded, and Sweeney's alternative suggestion at the time, that it be called the Turret, has survived, though it is still occasionally called The Tower.

And, finally, there is Amphlett's, the sharp-pointed peak to the right of the Turret, named after G.T. Amphlett, who was one of the six men who made the first ascent of Cathkin. It is easily climbed by a north-facing gully.

Below the brooding precipices of Cathkin Peak lies the smiling valley of the Sterkspruit, one of the first areas in the Drakensberg to know the advent of man. First came the Bushmen, and then the amaZizi. Several of their burial places have been discovered in the valley. Then, from his lofty throne high in the heavens, the giant peak watched the coming of the white man, and gazed down upon his antics in the valley, far below. First came the Voortrekkers, pushing up from their encampments on the banks of the Great uThukela and the Little uThukela, and staking out their farms — Opperman's Kraal, Buffelshoogte, and many others. Then, in the 1840s, large numbers of the Dutch farmers moved out, and the Englishmen moved in, one of the first being David Gray, in 1855.

Then came the woodcutters, sawing timber for the developing villages and towns of the Midlands. Sawyer Nelson was busy in the Cathkin forests in the early 1890s, and Van Gruening in the Injisuthi. Some old graves where his homestead used to be can still be seen today. In the Makuruman, only a couple of kilometres from my home, a Mr Kruger dug his sawpits and built his home. The foundations are still there today, and so are the sawpits. For many years the Makuruman was called Krugerbos.

Then, over the years, came men and women who shunned the towns and the cities, and found a home in the wilderness — eccentrics, some of them, each playing his brief part, until each in turn, in the words of the Persian poet, "crept silently away to rest"[1], while Cathkin, in quiet understanding, looked down and approved.

Hodgson was one of them. Known as the "Old Man of the Berg", he lived alone with his dogs in a mud hut under the shadow of Cathkin in the Injisuthi valley. He was well spoken, and had been an officer in the British Army. He painted, and wrote for the papers, but was chiefly known for the Zulu busts he used to model in clay and sell to the visitors at Champagne Castle Hotel. Hodgson was a mysterious character and a complete recluse. But Mrs B.M. Tavenor of Edsyl, Hilton, has been able to shed some light on his background. John Hodgson was the son of William Hodgson of Mooi River, and was a brilliant man in many ways. But he had one failing. He was an alcoholic. Determined to conquer his affliction he decided to bury himself in one of the remotest valleys in the Drakensberg, far from the haunts of man and from temptation. He put up a gallant fight, but he did not win. He was not murdered as is generally thought. One day in 1935 he fell into a stream after an inevitable drinking bout and was drowned.

Another was Robert Hope Moncrieff, who was also living in a mud hut in the early 1860s. Moncrieff, as we have seen, was a brother of Colonel Moncrieff of the British Army who invented the Moncrieff gun used in the Crimean War. Robert Hope Moncrieff's servant at his isolated farm under the Little Berg, near the Maze, had been regimental servant to Colonel Moncrieff. Moncrieff had come of an aristocratic family. What strange circumstances had driven him, too, to this lonely spot, thousands of kilometres from his ancestral home in Scotland? He was murdered, and we tell his story in Chapter 4.

There were many others. In 1912 W. Carter Robinson found the grave of a white man far off the beaten track, on the slopes of Sterkhorn, overlooking the uMhlwazini River. The stones were neatly packed around it. Though old, it had obviously been well prepared. Whose was it? Again, no one knows.

In 1942 a lonely skeleton was found on the slopes of Cathkin Peak, with 40 gold sovereigns in what remained of the pocket. At first it was thought the skeleton was that of Dr Haviland, an entomologist who had set out from Couch and de Bathe's store near iNtaba'mhlophe on his bicycle in 1907. He had disappeared into the Drakensberg and was never seen again, though his bicycle was found some time later in a mountain cave, 10 or 11 km away. But this supposition was later discounted, and the mystery remains.

Incidentally De Bathe himself was a remittance man, an illegitimate son of King Edward VII and the Duchess de Bathe. He, too, could have told a fascinating story.

Then there was the inevitable Irishman. He was Pat McCormick, a Sinn Feiner who had been kicked out of Ireland. He, too, found a home in this lovely valley. He and his brother became bushrangers and cattle rustlers, and lived in a cave in the Nkwakwa stream, at the top of the Ndema forest, just above the present Cathkin Park Hotel. On one occasion, in 1906, Pat shot 40 oxen he had stolen and pushed them over a cliff, rather than let them fall back into the hands of the rightful owners!

Today the bushrangers and the outcasts have gone, and the Sterkspruit valley offers a home to some who have retired to its peace and tranquillity, to farmers and to many who serve the tourist industry.

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[1] From *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, tr. Edward Fitzgerald.

Six hotels served the area, although only five remain. First to be established (but now demolished) was Cathkin Park Hotel, started in 1929 by W. Carter Robinson, a fine man who lived practically the whole of his long life in the Cathkin area. None knew it better. Born in Pietermaritzburg in 1889, he came to Cathkin as a young farmer in 1910, and promptly announced his arrival by being the first man to climb Gatberg. From January 1924 to October 1934, as we shall see in a later chapter, he was first Honorary Forester and then Stipendiary Part-time Forester, and it was largely due to his efforts that the Forest Reserve was proclaimed in 1922. In 1925 and 1926 he had the enterprise to stock the upper reaches of the uMhlwazini, the Injisuthi and the Sterkspruit with brown and rainbow trout from Jonkershoek in the Cape. In 1929 he opened the first Drakensberg hotel in the area, and called it Cathkin Park Hotel. In 1935 he sold it to Otto Zunckel, and Otto put his two sons, Udo and Gerald in to run it. For many years they ran the hotel in the renowned Zunckel tradition.

The Hostel, Cathkin Park, Drakensberg.

Cathkin Park Hostel in 1935

Courtesy Anton Zunckel

Oom Hendrik Marten's original farmhouse which grew into the present Champagne Castle Hotel. The picture also shows the 1928 July Camp of the Natal Mountain Club

MCSA Archives

Cathkin Park Hotel was quickly followed by Champagne Castle Hotel. Hendrik Martens, familiarly known as Oom Hendrik, had catered for several Natal Mountain Club July Camps, particularly the 1928 one, and had become impressed with the potentialities of the tourist trade. Round about 1930 he bought the farm Wostyn, and erected the first buildings which were eventually to grow into the Champagne Castle Hotel that we know today. In 1943 he sold it to J. van Heyningen, the local Forestry official, for £6 000. Three years later Van Heyningen sold it for £23 000.

In 1940 Captain H.C. Whelan, an ex-Indian Army officer, came to the area, and decided to start a hotel of his own. He bought part of the farm Heartsease on the left bank of the Sterkspruit, and there built the well-known El Mirador Hotel, the hotel with the friendly atmosphere. It changed hands — and name — several times over the years, and is now known as the Champagne Sports Resort.

In 1943 David Gray, grandson of the original David Gray, built an hotel on his farm The Nest, not far from David Gray's original homestead, and so the Nest Hotel, known to thousands of bowlers from far and wide, came into being.

And finally in 1986, came Caley Lodge, in the Mtoti valley, and in 1987 the four-star Drakensberg Sun, adjacent to the site of the old Cathkin Park Hotel.

In 1954 R.W. Tungay, News Editor of the Daily News, bought the beautiful farm Dragon Peaks in the Sterkspruit valley. It was to be the birthplace of a dream, and it was to his son John Tungay that the dream came. The year was 1966.

The Little Berg, where Dragon Peaks is situated, is a land of singing streams and whispering forests, a land where liquid bird calls greet the dawn, and where the yelping cry of the jackal buzzard breaks the noonday silence, where the diapason organ notes of the thunder roll among the crags, and where the winds sing their immemorial song among the tall trees of the forest. To John Tungay came the dream that the songs of this lovely land should blend with the clear, sweet voices of boyhood, and that together they should make music in the hills and valleys of the Drakensberg.

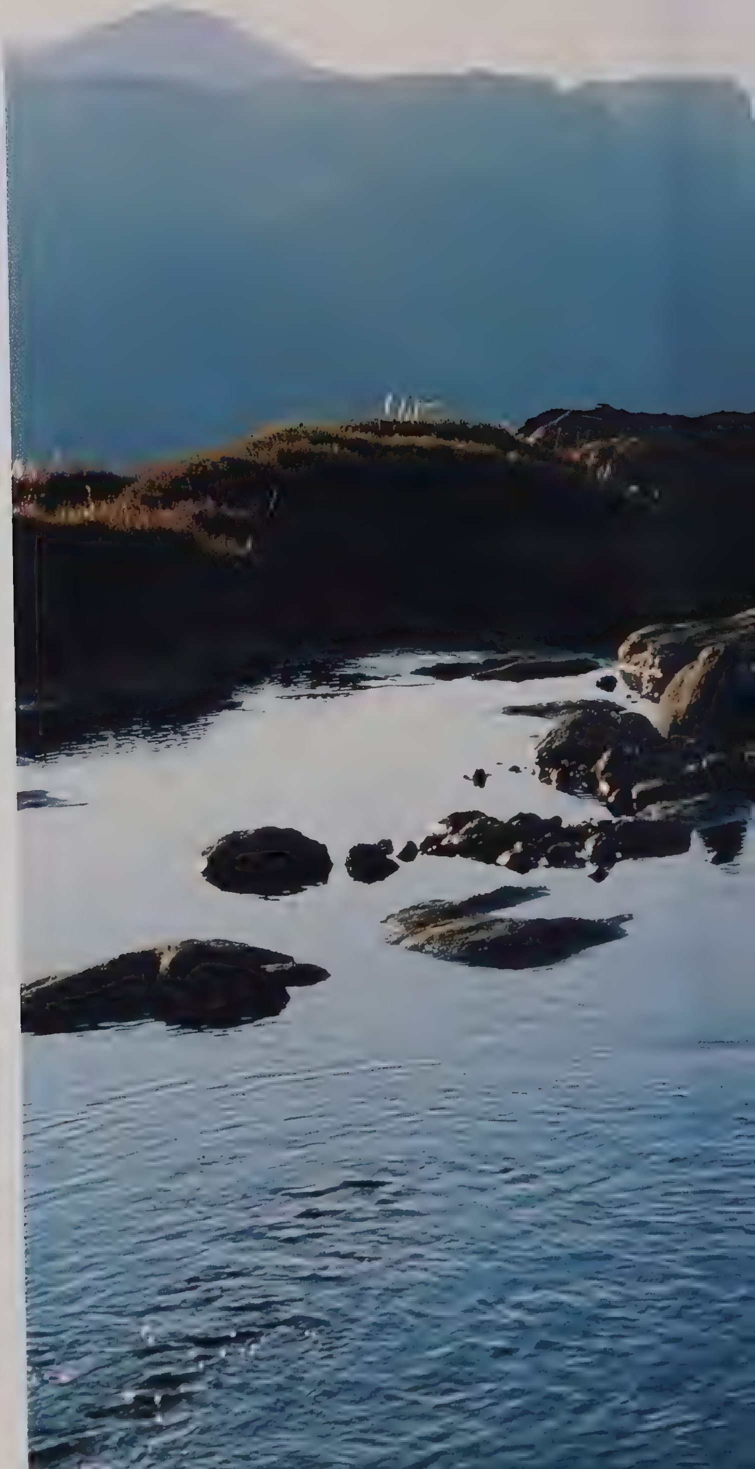
Drakensberg Boys' Choir School Dirk Mellema

And so it was that on 23 January 1967 the Drakensberg Boys' Choir School was opened, and the pleasant valleys of the Little Berg awoke to a new and a strange sound, the laughter of boys and their clear voices lifted in song. From the towns, villages and farms of South Africa they came, each boy carefully selected, and each with outstanding singing potential. Half were English speaking and half Afrikaans speaking, and the initial enrolment was 25. A Board of Governors was appointed, and I was asked to act as chairman (the school is only a couple of kilometres away from my home), a dedicated staff engaged, and the school was away to a good start.

Set in the heart of the Drakensberg mountains, with a scenic backdrop of towering mountain peaks, with the ice-cold crystal waters of the Sterkspruit running past its playing fields, no school could have a finer setting. The surrounding country, with its virgin forests and mountain gorges, holds for the impressionable mind of a boy all the thrill of adventure and exploration, while the gentler slopes with their wild flowers and tumbling streams cannot do otherwise than instil in him an enduring love of beauty. The singing of the boys has brought joy and pleasure to tens of thousands of people throughout South Africa, and overseas as well.

Perhaps most important of all, and tying up with the training of character, was the determination that the school would turn out not a crowd of cloistered choristers with pale, angelic faces, but young men who were tough and physically active, with strength of character and initiative. "Too many people," says John Tungay, "think of choir boys as insipid little angels. What's wrong with a choir boy being tough? Surely a boy can lead a healthy, normal life, and still enjoy singing for the sheer love of it." If you doubt this, you should see the little chaps in the rough and tumble of the boxing ring of an evening, after their Prep. has been done! A Durban newspaper carried an article on the school under the headline "Angels in boots".

A leading music critic on one of our major newspapers wrote after one of their concerts: "The pure sound and immaculate harmonising were of a quality as rare and refreshing as the exhilarating air of the upper slopes of the Drakensberg, and as effortless as the flight of an eagle." The dream had come true!



The cool, clear waters of the Didima pause for a moment of tranquillity before plunging over the escarpment to form the Didima Falls

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 13

THE GIANT'S CASTLE GAME RESERVE

They shall dwell safely in the
wilderness and sleep in the woods,
and none shall make them afraid.
Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

The Giant's Castle Game Reserve was proclaimed in 1903. Prior to this time the area was very little known. From as early as the 1850s we hear of commandos setting out in pursuit of raiding Bushmen and visiting the area of Giant's Castle, but their activities centred round the country to the south of the peak, in the valleys of the Lotheni and the emKhomazi rather than to the north, the area of the present Reserve. Early maps show a number of bridle paths south of Giant's Castle. There are none to the north. No doubt hunting parties often visited these mountain slopes, but they left no written record behind them. Major Grantham must have spent some time here in 1860 when he was drawing up his military map. But there was little else.

In February 1864 a small survey party left the Dargle for the Drakensberg. It consisted of Bob Speirs, Augustus Bovill (a surveyor) and the three Bucknall brothers, Henry, Edgar[1] and Fred. They discovered a new pass at the head of the Bushman's River, which is almost certainly the pass we know today as Giant's Castle Pass, and they climbed the Giant, again almost certainly by this pass. They took two hours to reach the top, where a tremendous thunderstorm swept down on them, and then they walked south along the top of the escarpment, discovering yet another, and better, pass at the head of the Lotheni. I believe this to be the iNhlathimbe Pass, which figures in the Langalibalele "Rebellion". (See page 340.)

The party was out 10 days altogether, returning on 9 February, covered in mud (it had rained most of the time) and ravenously hungry. "My word," says John Shedden Dobie in his journal, "how they did pitch into the tucker, before dinner (more cooking had to be done!) as well as after! Ditto, ditto at supper, and spasmodically at all times during the evening! I think I heard some of them at it during the night!" Dobie seemed to know the area fairly well. He made several references to Giant's Castle in his journal. There is no record, however, of his having climbed the mountain, though he was nearly included in the survey party described above.

The end of 1873 and the first half of 1874 saw considerable activity around Giant's Castle and it became internationally known, for this was the time of the Langalibalele affair. For some months a detachment of the 75th Regiment was encamped at the junction of the Bushman's River and the stream which rises in the Langalibalele Pass, just below the Main Caves. Their cook carved the figure 75 on a large rock just outside their camp, and it can still be seen. During the first six months of 1874 John Eustace Fannin, as we have seen, was commissioned by the

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[1] A little over a year later, in May 1865, Edgar Bucknall was savagely murdered on the Natal-Transkei border. His body was never found.

Government to survey the passes in the area, and Colonel Durnford was ordered to blow up these passes. Both men spent about six months in the area.

For 29 years nothing more was heard of Giant's Castle, and then, in 1903, the Natal Government proclaimed it a Game Reserve. On 9 November of that year, the first Game Warden, Sydney Barnes, made his way up the Bushman's River valley to take charge of his new domain. It was a wild and beautiful stretch of country: 25 km of towering peaks, of remote and lonely valleys, where the only sound was the singing of the mountain streams. The winds blew fresh and sharp, the air was like the clean bite of dry wine, and the dawn came quietly over far horizons.

Giant's Castle and the Little Bushman's River

John Hone

The original idea of the Reserve was to protect the fast-disappearing herds of eland that roamed the mountain slopes. From an estimated three to four thousand, they were now down to about 200, and would soon disappear completely unless something was done for their protection. Originally 12 140 hectares were set aside, but from time to time this was added to, and today the Reserve stands at about 35 000 hectares. It stretched from Giant's Castle in the south to the Injisuthi Hutted Camp in the north. Today it is part of the great uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park. Declared a World Heritage Site in 2000, the park of 243 000 ha stretches from Royal Natal National Park in the north to Bushman's Nek in the south.

And so it was that on a summer's morning, towards the end of 1903, Ranger Sydney Barnes stood on a small eminence and surveyed his new domain. Behind him towered the sandstone cliffs of the Little Berg, red, yellow and brown, streaked with grey and black. To his left, heaving its massive bulk up into the sky, was Giant's Castle itself, 3 316 m high. Two hundred metres below him, flowing strongly and steadily, was the Bushman's River. Its faint murmur reached him in the silence of the early morning, the only other sound the sigh of the wind in the sugarbushes. And beyond, a wild glory of tumbled mountain peaks and mysterious, untrodden valleys.

He had managed to get his wagon up as far as Witberg (Witteberg on the Parks Board maps), the present entrance gates to the Reserve. From there it had been a case of porters and hard foot-slogging, 12 km of wild and broken country, the valley of the Bushman's, without even a footpath to guide their way.

No man could have lived a lonelier or more isolated life. For months he lived in a mountain cave. The nearest white man was a two-day trek away, the nearest store the one at iNtaba'mhlope, under Couch and De Bathe, and when the bitter snows of winter swept down from the heights and choked the valleys, he was snowed in for weeks at a time.

From the day Barnes arrived he kept a diary, which has been jealously guarded by subsequent wardens of the Reserve. I have seen this diary.

Ranger's cottage in 1906, about the time Sydney Barnes handed over to Roden Symons

Bill Barnes Collection

Absorbed, I have read its faded pages. The years have rolled back, and I have shared with Sydney Barnes his lonely life. I have sat beside him in his mountain cave as, wearied after a long trek into the mountains, he brewed his coffee before turning in, while the sunset faded on the peaks. I have fought with him the mountain fires, and watched as, tireless and relentless, he went on the trail of the occasional poacher.

There were leopards, and later on jackals, to hunt, game counts to be made, and boundaries to be inspected. I was with him when he explored the far Injisuthi for the first time, and I watched his house slowly rising on the site of the Warden's present lovely mountain home. And I was with him, too, on that grey, wet morning of 1 February 1906, a day of mounting fears, as Barnes and his rangers went out in search of a lost man.

An early party of visitors

Bill Barnes Collection

In the early days access to Giant's Castle Reserve was difficult

Bill Barnes Collection

On 12 January 1906, a young junior cleric of St Peter's, in Pietermaritzburg, the Reverend A.G. Bates, arrived to spend a few weeks with Barnes. On the morning of 31 January he went out for a stroll after breakfast, and he never returned. By lunch time Barnes was beginning to wonder what had happened to him. As the afternoon wore on he became vaguely uneasy, especially when a tremendous thunderstorm swept down. At dusk it was still raining, and there was no sign of the young man. By now genuinely alarmed, Barnes stood in the porch of his new home, peering out into the gathering dusk, but nothing moved save the swaying of the trees against the night sky, and the only sound was the ceaseless roar of the rain. All through the night it pelted down, and as the first light of day filtered through the wet and clinging mist, Barnes raised the alarm. Collecting together as many of his rangers as he could, he set out, up into the mountains. All through the day they groped about in the wet valleys, and on the mist-shrouded slopes of the hills, calling and listening. They managed to follow Bates's spoor almost to Giant's Castle itself, and then lost it. As dusk fell, weary and exhausted, they stumbled back home. It was still raining, and it rained all that night, but early the next morning they were off again, taking a different route this time. Again they drew a blank, and again, for the third night in succession, they listened to the rain pelting down.

At 7 pm on the third day they were startled by a sudden whine at the back door, and Bates's fox terrier, Nip, who had accompanied his master on his walk, came cringing through the kitchen door, starved and half frozen. This time they followed Nip's spoor, until once again the driving rain washed it out, and there was only the wet grass, and the silence, and the mist.

Bates was never found. They continued the search for many days, and even for years afterwards, at long intervals, but all to no purpose. In September 1906 Ranger Roden Symons took over from Sydney Barnes. Towards the end of his stay, in 1915, he made one final entry in the diary which he had taken over from Sydney Barnes:

> The search for Mr Bates failed. Nothing was ever found of his body. During the nine years I was in charge here I found several skeletons, but they were most probably those of rebels killed in the Langalibalele "Rebellion". I personally think that Mr Bates was benighted at the foot of the mountain, and taking refuge in one of the numerous dry water-courses, died of exposure, and the body washed away by the floods on February 2nd.

Roden Symons R.A. Symons

What then happened to Arthur George Bates? No one will ever know. But there is yet another postscript. Although it throws no light on the mystery, it is a very strange coincidence. Only a few years prior to young Bates's visit to Giant's Castle, round about 1898, another young man, also by the name of Bates, and also on a visit, but to Cape Town this time, went for a walk up Table Mountain, also after breakfast. He, too, never returned. The police and members of the Cape Town Mountain Club organised search after search, all to no avail, and eventually the whole thing was called off. But here the two stories differ. Years later, two young men climbing on Kloof Corner Ridge on Table Mountain found a skeleton on a narrow ledge. Among the remains of the skeleton was a badly tarnished watch, though still in working order, and a wallet, which clearly established the identity of the body as that of Bates. Today among the other relics in the Club Room of the Cape Town Mountain Club one can still see that old and badly tarnished watch.

To return to Giant's Castle. Sydney Barnes spent three lonely years at the Reserve, and in September 1906 he handed over to Ranger Roden Symons. When Symons took over, the Reserve was pretty much as Barnes had found it. A house of sorts had been built, but the nearest neighbour was still 30 km away, there were still no roads, and of course cars were unknown. His only companions were his black rangers, the wind in the long grass and the bark of the mountain baboon.

With time on his hands, and with an active mind and a still more active body, Roden Symons decided to take up oology (egg-collecting) as a hobby, a hobby which he passed on to his second cousin, Godfrey Symons, a good friend with whom I have often climbed in the Drakensberg. Godfrey assembled one of the finest egg collections in the country.

As an old man Roden retired with his memories to his home at Sweetwaters, just outside Pietermaritzburg. Shortly before he died on 28 September 1972, I spent a very happy morning with him, as he yarned away of those days more than half a century before. He soon found that bird-nesting in the Drakensberg was no picnic. The precipices were terrifyingly steep, and the forest trees often unclimbable. Day after day he went out, pinpointing the nests of black eagles, jackal buzzards, martial eagles, and the occasional lammergeier. On one occasion he went over the edge of a cliff on a length of rope, but the rope jammed in a crack, and his game guards were unable to haul him back. Above him was an overhang, and though he tried desperately, he was unable to climb it and free the rope. For some time he hung there suspended. Eventually, by shouting up, he managed to persuade one of the guards to climb down and free the rope.

The yellowwood trees offered a different problem. Their boles

Malcolm Pearse

Upper Injisuthi Cave

Looking out on the swirling clouds on a cold winter's morning towered up, smooth and sheer, for 10 to 15 m, but at the top would be the coveted nest of a martial eagle or a yellowbilled kite. Here Roden worked out a system of iron spikes which he would drive into the smooth trunk, and up which he would climb. In the Reserve itself he continued the lonely work of his predecessor, and watched it growing in strength and stature.

For three years he worked alone, but in December 1909 he was joined by his younger brother, Bryan. Bryan spent two years in the Reserve as Assistant Ranger, and when he left in 1911 his place was taken by a young man by the name of Philip Barnes. Philip was no relation of the original Sydney Barnes. He had been in the employ of the Natal Government Railways, in Durban, but, disliking the job, he gave it up in 1911 and took over the vacant post of Assistant Ranger in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve.

Roden Symons spent nine years in the Reserve, and in 1915 was asked to take over the infant Hluhluwe Game Reserve, in Zululand. He had done a magnificent job. By the time he left there was even a road of sorts, and before he said goodbye to the Reserve he had the proud distinction of being the first man to drive a battered Ford over its bumpy surface and into the silence of the great peaks. Philip Barnes, his assistant, had recently married, and when Roden Symons left in 1915, he was the obvious choice to take over as Warden.

I often wonder what Philip's young wife Rosie must have felt when he led her into his mountain home. There certainly was a house of sorts, but she often had to cook under an umbrella, because it leaked so badly. There certainly was a road, but it was often blocked by landslides and snow for weeks at a time. There was a doctor, but he was 50 km away at the other end of this road, and she had a growing family of children to bear and to care for. But they all survived. Among the children was a little chap named Philip after his father, but he was soon dubbed "Bill", and as Bill he remained. After being Warden of the Reserve for 15 years, Bill became Regional Warden for the whole Drakensberg. He retired in 1985 and after a few years running his trout farm at the entrance to Giant's Castle Game Reserve, retired to Hilton where he died in 2004.

Philip, his father, however, was the real father of the Reserve. His two predecessors, Sydney Barnes and Roden Symons had, of course, laid the foundations well and truly. But it was Philip and Rosie who, in a lifetime of dedicated service, built the Reserve up into the magnificent place it is today. They were both well fitted for the job. They seemed to thrive on the isolation and the loneliness. They even built a little hut, deeper still into the mountains, in one of the forests of the Injisuthi, 15 km away, to which they would periodically retire, "to get away from it all!" Its ruins are still to be seen today.

Among the wild animals they dealt with early on were wild dogs (or Cape hunting dogs), which would come in from Lesotho, raiding the game in the valleys of the Little Berg in packs. Over a period of two years Philip Barnes and his rangers found the remains of 50 eland and 250 smaller game. All attempts at eradication failed, but one morning in 1918, W. Carter Robinson and his brother, M.E. Robinson, came over from the Cathkin area, and a last determined effort was made to eradicate them. On the slopes of the main Drakensberg, in the headwaters of the Bushman's River, 17 wild dogs and one hyena were killed. The whole pack was finished off, and they have never been seen since in the Reserve[1]. Today iNkentshane Hill, a lesser peak in the Reserve, commemorates the episode (*iNkentshane* is the Zulu name for a wild dog).

Apart from hunting (Philip killed 600 jackals in his 32 years in the Reserve), there were roaring grass fires to control (in 1942 Philip's

P.R. (Bill) Barnes R.O Pearse

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[1] Through relentless hunting by man over the years the wild dog is now an endangered species in Southern Africa and a more enlightened view has been taken of these much-maligned wild creatures.

outhouses were burnt down, and he himself nearly lost his life), and poachers to contend with (in 1941, Mzania, one of Philip's game guards, was almost stabbed to death by a poacher).

In December 1947 the Reserve bade farewell to the man who had done more to establish it than any other, and Edward Thrash took over, with Bill, Philip's son, as his assistant. Philip and Rosie retired after 32 years of dedicated service to the Reserve they loved, to spend the evening of their lives in Estcourt, where Philip died in 1951 and Rosie 16 years later.

At the Reserve itself the work went steadily on. Edward Thrash remained at the helm until 1956, when Bill Barnes, who in the meantime had spent five years at the Royal Natal National Park, took over with his wife, Leila, and the two names, Giant's Castle and Bill Barnes, became synonymous. In 1971 Bill was promoted to the newly created post of Regional Warden of the Drakensberg, and Keith Meiklejohn, his assistant, took over as Warden of the Reserve.

Focal point of the Reserve is the great bastion of Giant's Castle itself, at its southern end. This huge mass, connected to the main escarpment by a narrow nek, is one of the cornerstones of the Drakensberg, swinging the range from north-west to south-west. At 3 316 m it is also one of the highest points in the whole Drakensberg.

The name Giant's Castle was originally given to the present Garden Castle, 53 km to the south, by Captain Allen Gardiner in 1835, as we have seen. Dr P.C. Sutherland, Surveyor General of Natal, is usually credited with transferring the name to its present locale in May 1865, but he was merely giving official recognition to an already long-established custom. As early as the 1850s Government reports of Bushman raids were calling the peak by its present name. In March 1856, for instance, Captain Allen pursued a gang of Bushman raiders into the upper waters of the Lotheni, and he uses the name Giant's Castle for the mountain immediately to the north of the Lotheni. In 1859 Dr R.J. Mann, Superintendent of Education, published a guide

'Solitude Valley' — now Injisuthi. It is from this valley that one gets the best view of Monk's Cowl between Cathkin Peak to its right and Champagne Castle on the left Malcolm Pearse

Martin Winter climbing Giant's Castle

Gillian Bettle

book to the Colony of Natal, and he, too, gives Giant's Castle its present, correct position, though he errs in referring to it as having been named by Captain Allen Gardiner.

Its Zulu name is Bhulihawu, the place of the shield thrasher, or Phosihawu, the shield flinger. H.C. Lugg thinks the name may refer to an actual individual who lived in the shadow of the mountain. I prefer to think that this is yet another example of the rich poetical imagery that is so typical of the Zulus. Giant's Castle is, indeed, the birthplace of storms. Round these tremendous precipices the clouds gather and the thunder roars, like the thrashing of a mighty shield. But suddenly the great storm clouds are flung out across the waiting land as one flings a shield, the storm begins to move out over the plains of Natal, and so we have Phosihawu, the shield flinger.

It was first climbed, as we have seen, in 1864, and this was almost certainly up the wide gully that runs up to the nek joining the peak to the main escarpment, on the northern side. This is the route normally taken today, and it is quite easy. It is known as Giant's Castle Pass. A more difficult route is up the Eastern Gully. The eastern face of the mountain is split by a tremendous chasm, running right away up to the summit, and, provided it is not iced up in winter, it can be climbed fairly easily without a rope.

In 1954 Martin Winter ascended the South Peak via the south-east Ridge, and in 1960, after several attempts, Des Watkins conquered the South Face via the Elandshoek Ridge. We have already told the story of Ted Scholes's climb up the North Face.

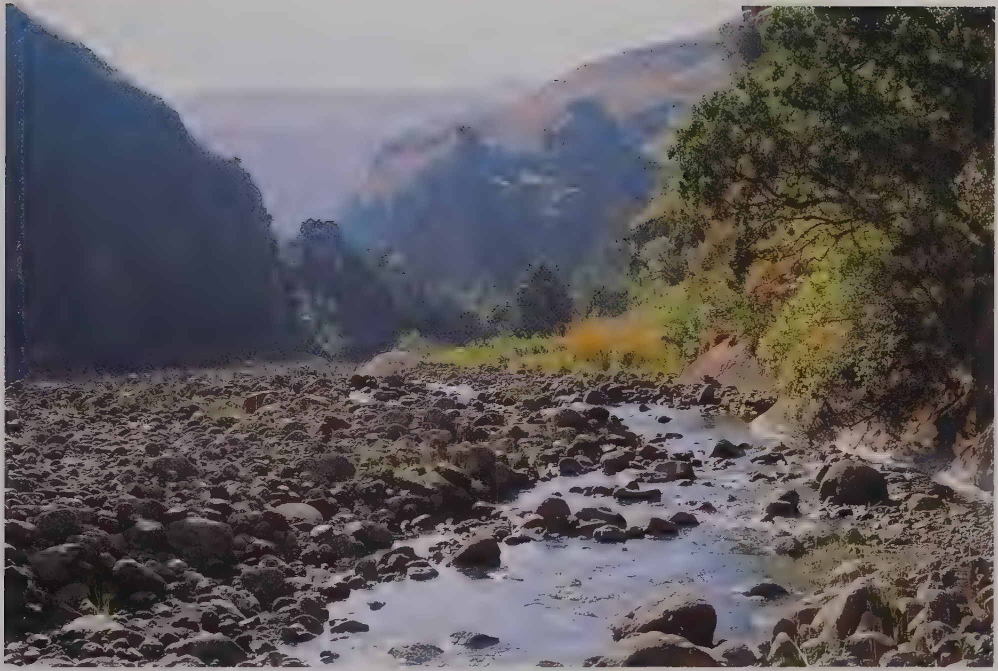
From the summit of this mighty peak the climber looks down on the whole of this vast Reserve. Immediately below is the lovely valley of the Bushman's River, with the hutted camp run by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and the Warden's house. Set among the rocks and natural bush of the Little Berg, in the middle of a wild flower garden, this hutted camp will be one of your most pleasant memories if you ever visit the Reserve. The accommodation consists of one- and two-bedroom self-catering chalets for two to six people, as well as a three-bedroom lodge. The wild flower garden is a tribute to the devoted work of Mr and Mrs K.B. Tinley[1], camp superintendents for 15 years.

The policy of the Parks Board was to retain the area in its natural state as far as possible. There are no roads in the Reserve, apart from the access road which leads to it, and some rough service tracks which provide the Warden and his rangers access to distant parts of the Reserve. For those who are adventurous, and who are prepared to

Meander Hut

Bill Barnes Collection

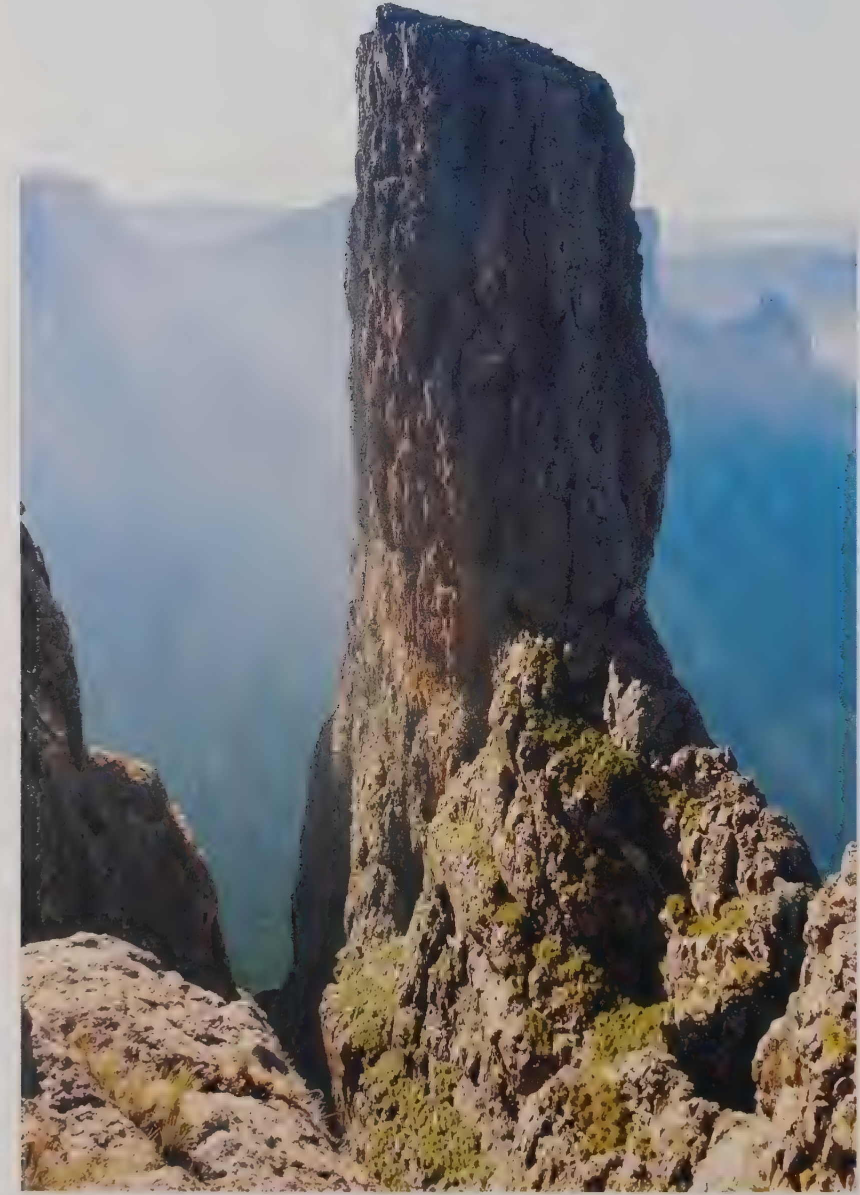
Parents of three sons who have served the cause of conservation — well-known ecologists Ken, John and Charles.



Malcolm Pearse

The Injisuthi Valley

A stream chuckles through a rocky watercourse in the quiet and lonely, wooded valley of the Injisuthi



Western Injisuthi Triplet

Malcolm Pearse

shoulder a rucksack and strike into the heart of the mountains, there is a series of mountain huts, simply equipped and provided with gas. Five are in use, one under the north face of the Giant, one at Bannerman, one overlooking Meander valley in the south-east of the Reserve, and one at Hillside outpost. The fifth is the Centenary Hut on the ridge just north of Corner Pass. It is beautifully positioned on the contour path north of Bannerman Hut. However the path northwards from Centenary traverses some pretty rough terrain and dwindles out with a poor path leading downwards to the Lower Injisuthi Cave.

From the pleasant settlement at the foot of Giant's Castle the eye wanders to the ridge on the left bank of the Bushman's River, over this to the valley of the Mchesana, and from there up to Cloudland's Col, a high ridge of the Little Berg, running out from the Corner and stretching finally to the high country around iNtaba'mhlope.

On the other side of this ridge lies the Injisuthi, surely one of the most beautiful areas in the whole Drakensberg. The Injisuthi River, or the Little uThukela as it is known in its lower reaches, rises in the maze of valleys that lie beneath the Great Injisuthi Buttress. From here it broadens out into a magnificent, deep-cut valley, a valley of tumbled rocks, of red sandstone cliffs, and of dark, lush forests alive with the timeless hum of insects and the sound of rippling waters. Here is Battle Cave, with its magnificent Bushman paintings, one whole panel depicting an attack on the cave in bygone days, and the Lower Injisuthi Cave, one of the loveliest caves I know of. Here, too, is Fergy's Cave. Sergeant I. Ferguson was a policeman who in the 1940s had been given the job of safeguarding the Reserve against poachers. He preferred to live out in the wilds, and for many years he made this cave his headquarters.

I shall always associate this remote valley with the golden days of autumn, for twice in years gone by, when my work had pressed heavily upon me, I came to this quiet valley and to the Lower Injisuthi Cave in the autumn time, and found peace there. On both occasions the whole valley blazed in a riot of red, gold and yellow, and the trees were leaping flames of scarlet and bronze. In memory I still return to those golden April days and those velvet nights, to the sparkle and freshness of dawn, to the pungent smell of the campfire at dusk, and, always, to the flaunting banners of those marching trees.

The area was bought by F.B. ("Tiny") Harries in 1963 and opened to the public as the Solitude Mountain Resort in 1968. In 1980 it was taken over by the Parks Board.

Of the higher peaks in this area there are the Great Injisuthi Buttress (3 207 m), the Old Woman Grinding Corn (2 986 m), and the Triplets. The Old Woman, *kwaMfasizwa ugay' amabele*, is a remarkable peak, connected, like Giant's Castle, to the main escarpment by a narrow nek. The appropriateness of the name can be realised if one looks at it from the north, from where the outline is exactly that of an old woman crouched over her grinding stone, and bending slightly forward. It was first climbed by Brian Godbold, Charles Axelson and Norman Hodson on 25 July 1937. They climbed the gully immediately south of the nek, up on to the nek, and from there traversed out on to the north face, a route which finally took them to the top.

South of the Buttress and the Old Woman are three free-standing remarkable peaks known as the Triplets. All three are very close to the escarpment edge, but completely separated from it. The Eastern Triplet (3 170 m) is a huge, massive block of basalt, towering up into the clouds. Next to it, like a thin flange, is the Middle Triplet (3 155 m). The north-eastern face of this peak, facing out into Natal, is smooth and sheer, and so close is it to the escarpment edge that from a little distance away it seems to blend in with it, and is seldom seen as a separate peak. In fact, for many years it was not even known to exist, and early accounts refer merely to The Twins.

The Western Triplet (3 187 m) is one of the most terrifying peaks in the Drakensberg. It towers up like a menacing spear, and ranks in climbing difficulty with Devil's Tooth in the Royal Natal National Park and the Column in the Cathedral area. To add to its difficulty, the rock is crumbly and dangerous. It was first climbed by David Bell and R.F. Davies on 3 July 1951. They climbed down from the edge of the escarpment on to a thin knife-edge which connected the peak to the main escarpment. From this knife-edge they reached the south-east ridge and then climbed its south-eastern face.

The Eastern and the Middle Triplets were conquered in December 1950. The Eastern Triplet was climbed by a party led by Ted Scholes, consisting of Lorna Pierson, R. Forsyth and Des Watkins. (This climb has been described in Chapter 6.) The Middle Triplet fell a few days later to Lorna Pierson, Gillian Bettle and Des Watkins.

The Western Injisuthi Triplet — with the Eastern Triplet in the background

Malcolm Pearse

Although the lower reaches of the Injisuthi were probably among the first to be visited by whites (these valleys were only about 25 km away from Gert Maritz's Laager of 1838 on the banks of the Little uThukela), the upper reaches and the region of the great peaks were among the last to be explored. In 1937 the Natal Mountain Club held its annual July camp in the area for the first time, and made a thorough exploration of its possibilities. The Great Injisuthi Buttress, Scaley Peak, the Lion, the Injisuthi "Twins" (the name was later changed to "Triplets"), Leslie's Pass (named after Roden Symon's son, Leslie), and Marble Baths Stream, were all named. KwaMfasizwa ugay' amabele, an already existing Zulu name, with its English equivalent, The Old Woman Grinding Corn, was adopted as the name for this peak.

P.R. (Bill) Barnes, stocky, tough, bronzed, and one of the finest climbing companions any man could wish for, was the moving spirit in the development of this mountain sanctuary for 25 years. He believed the mountains were the heritage of all, but he was not prepared to throw them open to the hordes of trippers who would destroy and desecrate. For the genuine lover of the mountains he would do anything, and he believed passionately that young people especially should be taught the lure of the wilderness. Many a party of schoolboys and schoolgirls, who spent a few days in the Reserve, learnt to bless the name of Bill Barnes. He believed that any attempts made to make the Drakensberg more accessible to the general public must ensure that its natural beauty remained untouched. Tarred roads bring fast motor cars, and beer cans, and erosion. Tarred roads bring filling stations, and speed, and pollution. He wanted none of these, but rather a series of bridle paths, with every now and then an isolated cabin, supplied with gas and fitted with bunks, to give a night's shelter to hikers and mountaineers out for several days.

He converted the Main Caves, about 1,5 km from the hutted camp, into a natural museum. Here a set of life-size Bushman figures is grouped around an open hearth. One of them, the Old Man of the cave, is painting an eland on one of the walls. Many of the items used were actually found in the area. Others are exact replicas of items found elsewhere, such as bows and arrows. It is all uncannily real, and as you sit on a nearby rock and take in the scene, time loses its meaning, the years roll back, and the ancient past lives again.

Other ideas that Bill put into practice were guided wilderness trails, on which trailists were able to go out for two to five days, on horseback, accompanied by a Trails Officer, sleeping out in the open or in mountain caves.

There is fishing, too. The lower reaches of these clear, frothing mountain streams have all been stocked with brown trout, and today there are 25 km of fishable water in the Reserve. If you want a foretaste of heaven, get up early one sparkling morning, catch your trout while the dew is still on the grass, and then savour the smell as it sizzles on an open fire before you start your climb. Bill himself was a great fisherman — and not only for the sport of it. I have known him go off into the mountains for several days with only a fishing rod over one shoulder, and a mysterious small black bag on the other. "You can live for days," he would say with a speculative twinkle in his eye, "on nothing but whisky and trout!"

But the richness of the Reserve has to be seen to be believed. Altogether 70 sites of Bushman paintings have been discovered so far. The scenery, of course, is magnificent. In the clear air, under the sun of summer, the hills are a carpet of green, and in the autumn their gold sweeps tranquilly up to the blue of distant peaks.

There are literally hundreds of species of wild flowers, trees and ferns. The birdlife is fantastic: 172 species of birds have been identified in the Reserve. And on these rolling hills roam eland, oribi, mountain reedbuck and grey rhebok, and on the high ledges of the mountains the shy little klipspringer browses.

When the Reserve was first proclaimed in 1903, its main object was to provide a sanctuary for the fast-disappearing eland, one of the noblest, and certainly the largest, of South Africa's antelopes. At one time it was the commonest antelope in the Drakensberg. We know this from accounts of early hunters, and also from the Bushman paintings that adorn the cave walls in the sandstone cliffs of the Little Berg, where the eland is the commonest animal depicted. But by the turn of the century the herds that roamed these mountain solitudes in peace and security were gone and the numbers were down to a meagre 200 individuals. W. Carter Robinson considered that in 1900 there were only 20 left in the area of the present Reserve.

The eland, *Taurotragus oryx* (the Zulu name is *Impofu*), is 150 cm to 180 cm in height, about the size of a large ox, and a weight in the Drakensberg of up to 452 kg. This is considerably less than the weight — up to 820 kg — of eland found in other parts of Africa. He is buff-coloured, turning to grey as he grows older. He has a very distinct black vertical stripe from his horns to the root of his tail, and long, hanging dewlaps. Both sexes have fairly long, spiralled horns. The eland is both a grazer and a browser, and is particularly partial to *Buddleia salviifolia* and *Halleria lucida*. In his wild state he is nervous and wary. If a herd of eland spots you — they have excellent eyesight — they will stand still for a few moments and then make off at a brisk trot, either up a slope or round the shoulder of a hill, seldom downhill. Their call is a low, barking note. Although a large animal, the eland is not aggressive. In spite of their great size they are excellent jumpers, and will easily clear a two-metre fence.

The Drakensberg eland are of especial importance, because they are directly descended from the original eland of that particular district. In the Sudan there is a giant species *Taurotragus derbianus gigas*, which can weigh up to 1 000 kg.

Today, in Natal, they occur from Giant's Castle south to Cobham State Forest. Under former natural conditions it is almost certain that they used to winter in the Thornveld, spending only their summers in the Drakensberg, but owing to increased hunting and to the opening up of the Midlands of Natal to the early settlers, they sought permanent refuge in the Drakensberg. They are, however, great wanderers, and the Natal Parks Board at one stage erected a strong 220 cm 10-strand eland fence around the Reserve. With their great jumping ability it did little

Giant's Castle, 2004

John Hon

to restrict the movement of the eland, however, and when the fence fell into disrepair it was not replaced.

In 1958 two eland were killed in the Upper uThukela Location, between Cathedral Peak and the Royal Natal National Park. They were probably following their old instinct of migrating to the Thornveld. The concentration of eland in the Drakensberg throughout the year does not cause problems of overstocking or overgrazing because of the high calf mortality. This is as high as 60 per cent, and is due to the poor nutrition of young animals in the harsh mountain environment.

The eland is generally a docile animal. Even bulls in captivity rarely become vicious, although one should remain cautious and vigilante near any "wild" animal. In about 1745 a young eland bull was sent to William of Orange from the Cape. It was tamed, and was taught to pull a trap.

Eland meat is tender and most palatable. As far back as 1848 Methuen proposed that the eland should be domesticated. In 1914 Theodore Roosevelt wrote: "We have rounded up a herd of eland quite as easily as we could round up the old-style Texas cattle. Eland are easily tamed, and although so big, are less pugnacious than any other big antelope. The American Government should make a business of importing, taming and training them."

Actually there have been several attempts at domesticating the eland. A notable one was made at Askanya Nova, in southern Russia, in 1895, where a good deal of useful information was collected. In 1954 a small herd was established at Zezani, in the heart of Zimbabwe Mopane country, 120 km from Beit Bridge. It was soon found that eland would flourish in an area quite unsuitable to cattle, and John Posselt, in charge of the experiment, formed the opinion that eland meat was equal, if not superior, to beef.

Here in the Drakensberg the first attempts to domesticate the eland were made as far back as 1907. In that year Roden Symons caught a number of calves and sent them to Cedara. Nothing came from this attempt, but a year or so later calves were supplied to several farmers in the Natal Midlands, notably to Andrew Sclanders and the Moe brothers at New Hanover. The Moes were the most successful in achieving results, and one of the brothers actually rode an eland round the show ring at the Royal Agricultural Show in Pietermaritzburg! Among others, General Smuts obtained a pair from the Reserve, and Roden Symons took them up personally to Irene and had the privilege of lunching with the General.

But the most ambitious experiment so far was undoubtedly that carried out by the Natal Parks Board at Lotheni, on the southern slope of Giant's Castle. Here an Eland Domestication Unit was established some years ago, and Professor C.W. ("Clem") Abbott, Head of the Department of Dairy Industry at the University of Natal, spent a year's sabbatical leave here, studying the eland. The herd reached about 40 head, and invaluable information was obtained concerning the growth and handling of the domesticated animal.

Prospects of increasing the world's steadily decreasing supply of protein foods in this way should be good. It has already been proved that the eland can be domesticated, that the meat is excellent, and that eland farming can be carried on successfully in areas too dry for conventional cattle farming. But the work is only in its infancy, and much has still to be done. The Russian experiment showed that small, selected herds soon deteriorated through inbreeding, and the present small numbers of eland (a couple of thousand at most, compared with the millions of beef animals) preclude the possibility of larger domesticated herds at present. Eland milk is different from cows' milk, but is very nutritious. Again there are possibilities, but years of selective breeding will be required before a good milking strain can be developed. However, the eland has not caught the imagination of the rancher, who still finds it easier to rear cattle.

Today, in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve, and in the area south of Giant's Castle, the eland is flourishing. From being on the danger list, numbers have now increased to a figure which makes the future of the eland assured.

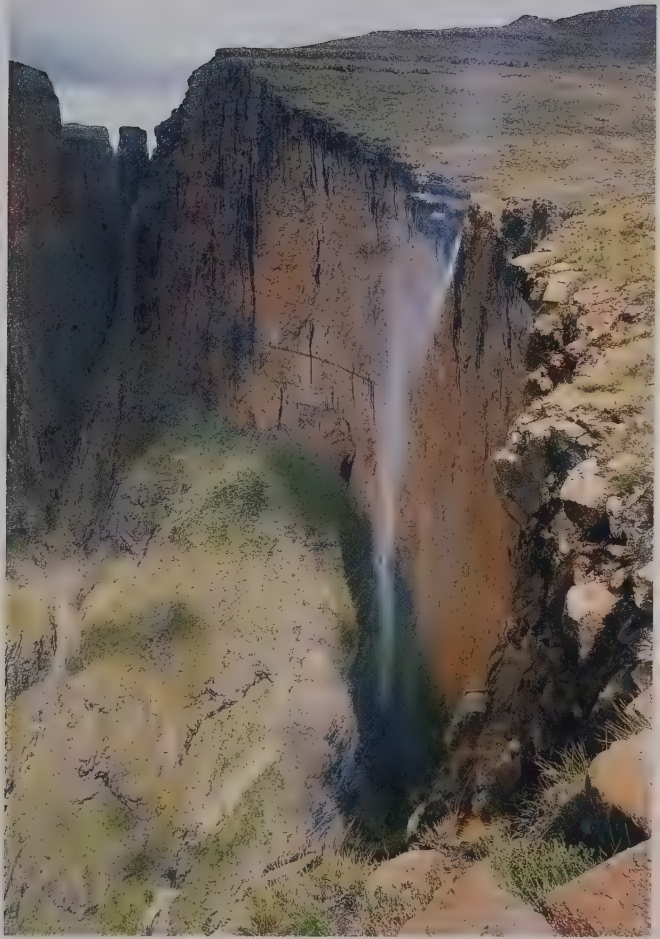
The Natal Parks Board attempted to re-introduce three species of antelopes which used to roam these mountain slopes in the past, but which fell to the hunter's gun and disappeared. These were the red hartebeest, the black wildebeest and the blesbok.

By 1960 the red hartebeest, *Alcephalus buselaphus*, had disappeared from Natal and Zululand, although at one time they were fairly common, especially in the Drakensberg. It was in the early 1960s that an effort was made to re-introduce them into the Giant's Castle Game Reserve. Animals were imported from the Kimberley district and from South West Africa. In 1962 two were released in the Reserve. By October 1968 a nucleus herd of 30 had been built up, but since then they have declined. No more animals were introduced, and the herd has moved south of the Giant's Castle Game Reserve to Highmoor where a few individuals remain.

The red hartebeest is not a handsome animal. He is too short in the body, too long-legged, and rather high in the shoulder. The face is long and narrow, and the horns, present in both sexes, take an almost right-angled curve backwards about two-thirds of the way up. The coat, as the name indicates, is reddish-brown, with a purplish sheen on the back. Their gallop, too, is ungainly. They seem to bounce along on stiff-jointed legs, swerving from left to right, though they have a considerable turn of speed. The call is difficult to describe. Bill Barnes described it as like air being expelled through lips that flap loosely to the accompaniment of a low, base note.

The black wildebeest, *Connochaetes gnou*, sometimes known as the white-tailed wildebeest or white-tailed gnu, is an even more ungainly animal. Sometimes, it would seem, the Creator, in an impish mood, seizes the tools of the satirist and creates something almost out of a nightmare. Some lizards and geckoes are like this. And He must have been in a particularly impish mood when He created the black wildebeest. With his shaggy coat, his drooping head and neck, his thin, ungainly, spindly legs, his bleary eyes, his scruffy beard standing out in every direction, and his hangdog, half-witted expression he is, indeed, the hippie of the animal world! He is well known as the galloping beast on the old Natal Coat of Arms, and also appeared for a few years on the reverse side of the South African 2 cent coin.

Owing to overexploitation and agricultural development, the black wildebeest came close to extinction earlier this century. Early travellers left records of vast herds of black wildebeest on the plains of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State and Natal. He probably roamed the slopes of the Drakensberg as a summer migrant. But his numbers soon began to tail off. It was found that his skin could easily be converted into leather of a fine quality, and a significant trade developed in these skins, many being exported overseas. In Natal the last black wildebeest was shot in 1916. By 1946 the total population, including specimens in zoos throughout the world, was down to a mere 1100. But in 1954 the Natal Parks Board began to re-introduce them into the province. Specimens



Malcolm Pearse

Red Wall Waterfall

The infant Injisuthi River becomes a lace-like mist as it plunges down the sheer face of the escarpment in one of the most spectacular falls in the Drakensberg

Eland (Taurotragus oryx) John Hone

were obtained from the De Beers farms near Kimberley and sent to the Giant's Castle Game Reserve and to the Royal Natal National Park. By 1962 the Giant's Castle herd had built up to 32.

But the experiment was a disaster. The animals did not fare well, and were clearly pushed to the limits of endurance by the environment. The herd tended to remain for long periods in one place, causing serious damage. Some were rounded up and moved away. Those that could not be caught gradually died out, and today there are no longer any black wildebeest in the Drakensberg.

Blesbok bones have been found in cave litter in the Drakensberg, a slender link to their existence as a Drakensberg species. But, like the red hartebeest and the black wildebeest, the re-introduction of the blesbok to the Drakensberg was a failure. Animals brought in during the 1960s never bred well, and their numbers slowly declined. A few blesbok remain in the Stillarus section of Kamberg. There they move between the park and surrounding farms, spending more time out of the reserve than in it. If they all die out, no more will be imported.

There is no doubt whatever that the Natal Parks Board, now Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, has done magnificent work, not only in the establishment and running of its game reserves (there are more than 40 game and nature reserves in Natal) but in its control of wildlife generally, and in restocking the reserves with species that had died out.

But there are significant dangers ahead. There are some who hold that prior to the European settlement of the country, the game was largely migratory in character. Animals rarely wintered in the Drakensberg, preferring the sweeter grass and warmer valleys of the Thornveld. The inferior size of Drakensberg eland, and the failure of the red hartebeest, black wildebeest and blesbok, underline this. Today, with our fences, our railroads and highways, our ploughed lands, our developing towns and cities, migration is impossible, and the game is confined to one area all the year round. This leads to damage through overgrazing. Once man interferes in any way whatever with the delicate balance of nature, the result is disastrous. Chain reactions set in, with incalculable results. Damage due to overgrazing could lead inevitably to eventual paddocking and artificial feeding, and the game reserve would be reduced in status to that of a glorified zoo. If this happens it will have been a direct consequence of the tourist's desire to see game, for the species being introduced are in little danger of dying out. In other words, it is apparently the profit motive which is dominant, and the results would be that fauna would be protected at the expense of flora. This was the view of Professor H.P. van der Schijff, Professor of Botany at Pretoria University, and the late U.W. Nanni, formerly Forest Hydrologist in the Department of Forestry, agreed with him.

This clash of interests between the demands of the tourist industry and the demands of the nature conservationists is an ever-present one. When our game reserves were first proclaimed they were designed purely for the protection and conservation of game. It was only later that tourists started clamouring to see game. In America this tendency has reached alarming proportions. The Yosemite National Park in California is visited by thousands of tourists a day, whose noise practically drowns even the thunder of the famed Yosemite Falls! The Kruger National Park, with its huge camps, its stores and its restaurants, its tarred roads and its filling stations, is in danger of going the same way. So far, I am glad to say, in KwaZulu-Natal this pressure has been largely resisted. There should be no roads in the reserves, apart from the access road. There has been some moderate expansion and modernisation of hutted camp facilities but it has generally been sympathetic to the environment. Bill Barnes' idea of a series of mountain huts, at 15 km distances, fitted with bunks and supplied with gas, is excellent. They are designed for the man who is prepared to go out on the two legs God gave him, carrying his food on his back, and glad to make the effort needed to enjoy what nature has to offer.

Should we not make a distinction between reserves and recreational areas? Nature reserves, certainly, should be primarily for wildlife and environmental conservation. They can be used for outdoor recreation within reason, but they should be kept primarily for the genuine lover of nature. Fortunately the Parks authority makes this distinction, but our Drakensberg hotel resorts are losing their original purpose. I have seen these resorts invaded by a motley crowd who wanted little more than their bowls, their tennis and their golf, their cards and their sundowners. They rarely lift their eyes to the mountains, they rarely venture into them, and never once do they feel their hearts stir with wonder and delight at the wildlife around them[1]. Tennis and bowls and golf are first class and worthwhile recreations, but our Drakensberg hotels, originally at least, were designed mainly for lovers of nature, hikers and mountaineers.

In his annual report for 1967/68 Dr D. Hey, former Director of Nature Conservation for the Cape, said: "It is most important to reduce the public pressure on nature reserves and national parks by providing recreational facilities elsewhere for those who are not particularly interested in wildlife, but merely wish to relax out-of-doors. It is quite possible for a nature reserve to be destroyed by an excessive number of visitors." He could not have put it more clearly. Let us at least keep our Drakensberg reserves inviolable from this sort of thing.

Man has got to do a lot of rethinking if he is to survive. In the past he has adopted the arrogant assumption that he is apart from the animal kingdom, sole owner of the world in which he lives, that he is Lord of Creation and can do what he likes with his environment. Since 1600 the world has lost 101 species of birds and 46 mammalian species, 44 of the former and 27 of the latter within the last 50 years. And year after year he spews out, at an increasing rate, his polluting gases into the atmosphere and his filth into the oceans.

Man is not a distinct entity. He is an inseparable part of the whole of nature, and you, and I, and all the creatures of the wild, are fellow travellers, with a common goal, a common destiny, and a common fate on a small and very vulnerable planet travelling through the depths of space.

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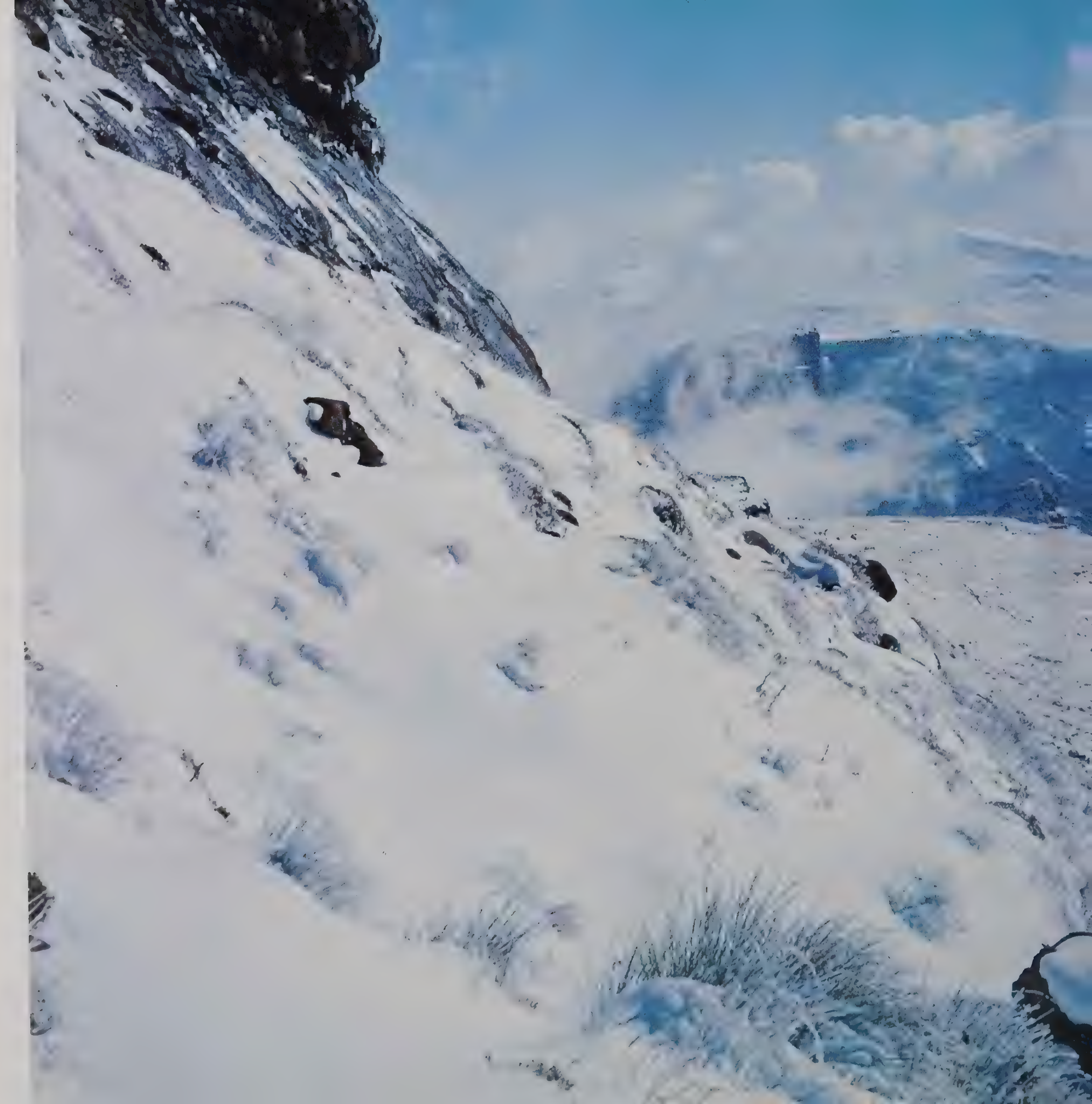
[1] Russell Tungay, managing director of the large Dragon Peaks Holiday Resort in the beautiful Sterkspruit valley near Champagne Castle, told the Drakensberg Symposium in 1987 that fewer than one per cent of his guests "made it through the gates at Monk's Cowl Forestry Station" and up into the Little Berg.



Winter Peaks

Mantles of snow cover the summits in the Injisuthi area

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 14

THE SILENT SNOW

The silent snow possessed the earth.
Tennyson, "In Memoriam"

The Amphitheatre plateau in winter ... beautiful but very exposed

Malcolm Pearse

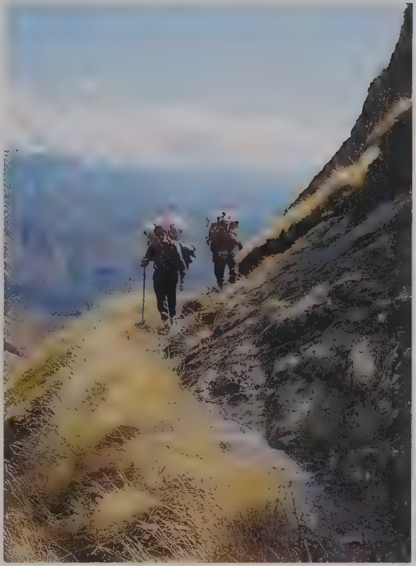
I shall never forget that evening late in June 1969, when the telephone rang with the message from Cathedral Peak Hotel to the effect that my son, Malcolm, was missing on the summit of the Drakensberg in a snow blizzard. For 25 years, in storm and sunshine, we had climbed in the Drakensberg together, since that day many years ago when I had taken him, a little lad 10 years old, on his first trip into the mountains. (Even in those days I used to make him carry his own pack — a little canvas bag made by his mother, 40 cm square and weighing 4 to 5 kg. Years later he carried his own full-size 35 kg pack, plus his father's as well!) Never once had we ever run into any serious trouble. Now he was missing, in a blizzard that had already lasted two days.

Ten days previously I had dropped him off at the end of the new mountain road underneath Sentinel Peak, with two other young men, Mally Black and Robert Wood. They were setting off on a summit traverse from Mont-aux-Sources to Champagne Castle. Neither Mally nor Robert had ever climbed in the Drakensberg before: this was their first trip. It was Robert's voice I had heard telling me that evening that Malcolm and Mally were missing.

Malcolm, Mally and Robert leaving from the Sentinel car park R.O. Pearse

But what had happened? How had they got separated? Why was Robert at Cathedral Peak Hotel, when they had never intended going anywhere near the place? And where were the other two?

There was nothing I could do that night. I knew Malcolm was fully capable of looking after himself in the mountains, and he was not alone. He had set off with food for at least 10 days. I told Robert to put up for the night at the hotel, and I would be out first thing next morning to look into things. I left at the crack of dawn, and arrived at the hotel about 8 am. I shall tell the story of what had happened in Malcolm's own words:



Pathway leading up the Sentinel Malcolm Pearse

> When we got to the summit of the escarpment on that first day we found, as we had expected, that the whole area was blanketed in heavy snow. The uThukela River was frozen over completely. We did not worry at all, however. We had plenty of warm clothing and food, a small Alpine tent, and, though it was bitterly cold, the sun shone in a cloudless sky. We set off in high spirits on our long trek south.
>
> The first thing that went wrong was Robert. We found that he just couldn't take it. Apparently he was suffering from what is commonly called mountain sickness. He is a keen sportsman, and loves the open-air life, but the altitude was just too much for him. Some people are like that. He kept lagging behind, and seemed to have no energy at all. The snow, too, was very deep in places. With our heavy 35 kg packs we kept breaking through the thin crust and sinking in, often up to our waists, and the going was painfully slow. By the afternoon of the sixth day we had only reached the Abbey and the uMbundini Pass.

But it was unbelievably beautiful. Usually the summit at this time of the year is cold, bleak and desolate beyond description. Now vast snowfields stretched away to the distant horizons under a sky more intensely blue than any I have ever seen. The sun shone crisply, and black rocks, jutting out from the all-encircling snow, were sheathed in gleaming ice. Huge icicles hung from the rock faces, like giant teeth, hungrily bared. Over all brooded that intense silence which you always get on the summit after a snowstorm.

We camped that night, on the edge of the escarpment, overlooking the Abbey. Next morning we were up early. The weather was still fine. But it was from this point that things went really wrong.

From the Mnweni Cutback you can clearly see the line of the Berg, past the Mnweni Pinnacles, to the head of the Mnweni Pass, and then sweeping around to uMponjwana, the high ground round the Rockeries, and uMponjwana Cave. In actual distance the day's march would be short, for we had decided to sleep in uMponjwana Cave that night, but this particular stretch of the Drakensberg is a photographic paradise, and Mally and I were anxious to spend some time photographing those fantastic spires that make this particular stretch so memorable. As we were packing up after breakfast, Robert suggested that he might follow a Basotho trail that headed, quite clearly, for the Mnweni Pass, and wait for us there, so as not to hold us back with his slower pace. I did not quite like it, for I know that one should never separate in the Drakensberg, but there seemed to be no danger in it: the head of the Pass was clearly visible from where we were, nothing could possibly go wrong so long as he kept to the path. Eventually I agreed.

Frozen Amphitheatre Wall Malcolm Pearse

Mally and Robert pause to enjoy a view of the Mnweni Cutback. It was shortly after this that Robert became lost. uMponjwana Cave is in the top middle of the picture. uMlambonje Pass is beyond the distant snowfields Malcolm Pearse

Mally and I spent a useful morning with our cameras, among other things, incidentally, exploring a huge ice grotto we came across, with icicles at least 3 m high. At two o'clock we set off for the pass, about two and a half hour's walk away. Robert's footprints were clearly visible in the snow.

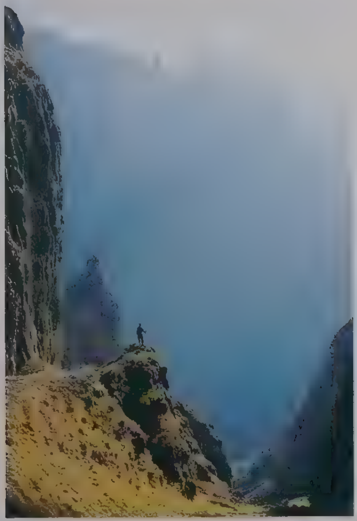
But when we reached the pass he was nowhere to be seen, nor was there any sign of his rucksack. What was more, the snow in the vicinity of the pass had melted, and we could no longer trace his footsteps. We weren't unduly worried, however, as it seemed likely that he might have strolled off to see the view, and would return before dark. We sat down to wait. Suddenly it was dark, and the stars were shining in a jet-black sky.

We still weren't worried. We argued that Robert had probably gone on to uMponjwana Cave, and was getting everything ready for the night. Perhaps he had already cooked the evening meal. With enormous appetites we set off up the slope to the cave.

Though we were hungry and a little tired we enjoyed that walk in the moonlight, for by now the moon had risen. The slope is a north-facing one, and much of the snow had melted. Perfect silence reigned. The air was fresh and still. The only sound was the occasional crunch of snow at our feet, as if we were walking over a floor of fragile glass, as we climbed steadily towards uMponjwana.

We reached the summit of the ridge at about nine o'clock. The cave was now only 50 m away. We gave a long, drawn-out call, and then another. But there was no reply! Blankly, in stunned silence, we stared at each other. Robert was missing!

To be out at night in the middle of the Drakensberg, in country to which you are a stranger; to realise that you are lost in one of the most desolate and inaccessible regions in South Africa, in a wilderness of snow and ice, without map or compass, would indeed be a frightening experience. We decided that we must make every effort to find Robert that night.



Robert was supposed have met up with Malcolm and Mally at the head of the Mnweni Pass. This picture, used for the cover of this book, was taken while waiting for him Malcolm Pearse

We dumped our packs in the cave, and climbed to a high point immediately above the cave. From here we spent the next hour flashing our torches in every direction, and calling at the top of our voices. We were met by complete silence.

Back at the cave we lit a candle and took stock of our position. There was nothing more we could do for Robert that night. A thorough search would have to wait for the morning. The next most urgent thing was a meal. We had been without food for nearly twelve hours.

And then, suddenly, the full horror of our position dawned on us: we were without food, or nearly so! Owing to Robert's condition it had been arranged that he should carry the lighter items, such as the food, while Mally and I shared the heavier items — the tent, the medical supplies, the snake-bite outfit and the photographic equipment. We emptied our rucksacks and pooled the contents — two small portions of cheese, a quarter slab of chocolate, some sugar, a few packets of Kool-aid, and a handful of biscuits! Common sense demanded that we head immediately for civilisation, where fresh supplies could be obtained. Even this would take one, possibly two, days, and we had barely food for even this. But how could we leave Robert, alone and lost in those snow-covered wastes? We decided to devote one whole day to a thorough search for him, and then, if we failed to find him, to head for home as fast as we could and raise the alarm.

The first thing we noticed next morning was half a dozen vultures circling over Rockeries Pass! Had Robert fallen to his death during the night? We headed straight for the spot, a kilometre away along the summit, in the direction of Cathedral Peak. For a full hour we searched, examining every crag and fissure, all to no avail. There was nothing.

We then decided that I should return along our previous day's route to the place where we had camped in the Mnweni Cutback. It was just possible that Robert had turned back to look for us on the previous day, and that we had missed each other. Mally would continue the search round Rockeries Pass and beyond.

It was a long slog back to our camping spot of two nights before. Longer still seemed my search. By 2 pm I realised it was hopeless, and I set out to return to the cave.

But now it was obvious that a change in the weather was coming. All day the air had been strangely motionless and warm. Now, suddenly, a cold wind sprang up from the south. Within seconds it became a wild, ripping, icy gale that knifed through every stitch of clothing I had. Then the storm gathered with amazing rapidity. It swept swiftly across the plains of Lesotho and broke with a roar over

Snowfields of Lesotho Malcolm Pearse

the waiting peaks. I raced for the cave.

Mally was there to greet me. He too had had no success, but he had managed to gather a little firewood. Crouched over our tiny fire that night, with the fiendish howl of the wind outside, we again took stock of our position. We could do nothing more for Robert. With a blizzard that might last for days upon us, and with no food, our own position was now perilous in the extreme. There was nothing for it but to head for home as rapidly as possible, raise the alarm, and see that a full-scale search was organised as quickly as possible. We hoped our food would last out long enough to permit our doing this.

Next morning it was snowing hard. We packed up, put on all the warm clothing we had, and with snow-anoraks pulled tightly around us, stepped out into the storm. We had decided to head south, for Cathedral Peak Hotel, the nearest point where help was available. We would trek along the escarpment edge, past Saddle, and so down the uMlambonje Pass, a trip that could be done in less than a day if necessary, but which, in our exhausted state, and with the storm still raging, might take up to three days.

I do not like to think about that trek. Our faces were soon crusted with ice, our beards stiff with icicles. Throughout the day it snowed, and every now and then the hail came down, savagely, windwhipped. At times the mist was so dense we could see no more than a metre or so ahead of us. We knew that if we were ever to find the uMlambonje Pass the weather would have to clear considerably, for the uMlambonje is one of the most difficult passes in the Drakensberg to find. It is narrow, and dips down from the summit at a high point along a ridge. Many an experienced mountaineer has failed to locate it in mist. To find it in a snowstorm such as this would be virtually impossible.

We staggered on throughout the long morning, and into the afternoon. The weather worsened steadily. Soon the snow was swirling down more heavily than ever. Visibility was reduced to nil. The wind changed continually, confusing our sense of direction. At one stage we found that we had wandered into Lesotho, and had to spend two hours retracing our steps. By 4 pm our strength was almost gone. We had been more than two days with little, if any, food. We were reaching the end. Exhausted, we tumbled down under some sheltering rocks, and once again summed up the position.

Our plight was now desperate. We were lost in a blizzard with only the shelter of a tiny tent. Our food supplies now consisted of a little Kool-aid and four biscuits. To make matters worse, while Mally had been crossing a frozen stream, the ice had broken in under him, and he had fallen through, up to his waist in icy water. He was wet through, and I was little better. Even our sleeping-bags were wet. It was now 4 pm, and already we could feel the temperature dropping. Soon the deep freeze of night would claim the summit. We could hardly expect to survive the night.

We decided there was only one thing to do: get down off those icy heights as quickly as possible, get down before night, head straight for the escarpment edge and take the first route, no matter how precarious, to the lower levels. Forget about trying to find the uMlambonje Pass. That could wait. We staggered to our feet and shouldered our packs.

And then, suddenly, the most dramatic change I have ever known took place. The clouds parted, patches of blue sky started to appear. A warm wave of pale sunlight spread across the snow. Moments later the mist was breaking everywhere, and the peaks, wreathed in drifting trails of mist, wet and sunlit, were standing out against a rain-washed sky. And, best of all, there was South Saddle behind us, the Mitre in front, and uMlambonje Pass only a kilometre away!

It is amazing how quickly one's spirits, even one's strength, can revive. I believe that we could have climbed Mount Everest at that moment!

Half an hour later we stood at the head of the pass, knowing that food and warmth and safety were now only five hours away. With luck we might even reach the hotel before midnight.

After a short rest we began the difficult descent. The head of the pass was choked with ice and snow, and we had to move with extreme caution. Three quarters of an hour later, just below the snow-line, we heard for the first time in 10 days the sound of running water. There is no more lovely sound than a little trickle of water tumbling down a gully when the voices of nature have been silent for so long. It called for a celebration, so we treated ourselves to a drink of Kool-aid!

But our new-found strength was shortlived. As night came on our spirits began to ebb, the clouds closed in once more, and soon it was raining. On the summit, of course, it would be snowing. With the help of one small penlight torch we made our way very slowly down the slippery gully. It was the blackest night I have ever known. We tripped, and stumbled, and fell, grazing our shins on the rocks and tearing our hands on thornbushes and briars. Lightning flickered on the far peaks.

At about nine o'clock we entered a thickly wooded gully. The rain was still teeming down and we had been on the go now for nearly 16 hours. Reluctantly we had to face the truth that we could not reach the hotel that night. We were too tired even to pitch the tent. We simply spread our sleeping-bags out on the wet ground, pulled the tent over us, and fell asleep.

There is not much else to tell. If Robert were to be saved, speed was now the all-important thing. We were up before it was light, and with what strength we could muster we sped down the valley. As we passed the junction of the Oqalweni two hours later we heard, faint and clear on the still morning air, the breakfast bell ringing from the hotel, two and a half kilometres away.

> And there, to our amazement, was Robert! You can imagine with what indescribable relief we saw his red beret and green jersey, just outside the reception office. He had got in late the previous afternoon.

After the two men had polished off three plates of porridge and two helpings of bacon and eggs, to say nothing of heaped plates of toast and marmalade, we all piled into the car and headed for Emkhizweni. During the drive we heard the full story of what had happened to Robert.

On the day Malcolm and Mally had spent photographing in the Mnweni Cutback, Robert had followed the Basotho trail round to the Mnweni Pass, as arranged, only he didn't realise that he had reached the pass. Thinking that it was still further on, he crossed the plateau beyond uMponjwana, and then came out at the head of Rockeries Pass, thinking it was the Mnweni Pass. Here he waited for several hours.

As darkness came on and there was still no sign of the other two he began to worry. All he could think was that they had missed each other along the way, that the other two had overtaken him and passed him,

A heavy snowfall stretches into the KwaZulu-Natal midlands

Malcolm Pearse

and were by then far ahead along the escarpment, looking for him. He hurried on in the moonlight, hoping to catch up with them. At 11 pm he found a rock overhang, and slept there.

Next morning, now thoroughly alarmed, in unfamiliar surroundings and completely lost, he nearly panicked. He did not know whether his companions were in front of him or behind. He decided that his best plan was to try and find his way down to the Cathedral Peak Hotel. He walked all that day. Towards late afternoon the clouds started to build up, and by evening it was snowing hard. That night, exhausted, he crept under some rocks and fell asleep. Next morning it was still snowing.

By now he was thoroughly frightened. He might be anywhere. He did not know the area, nor did he understand Drakensberg weather. He had no means of telling how long the storm would last. He was fairly comfortable and dry where he was, so he decided to lie up there until the weather cleared. After all, he had plenty of food.

About 11 am, he was startled by the strange sound of a dog barking nearby. The sound seemed to come from somewhere down below, in the mist immediately in front of him. Then suddenly a mangy Basotho puppy leapt up out of the mist at his feet, and scampered off with a frightened yelp when it saw him. He suddenly realised that where a dog could get up he could get down, and within 15 minutes his rucksack was packed, and he was on his way down, cautiously feeling his way through the drifting snow, which was still falling. By an amazing coincidence, one chance in a million, he had sought shelter on the very lip of the uMlambonje Pass, the only safe way of getting off the escarpment in a stretch of 12 km. By late afternoon he had found the hotel, and he immediately put through a call to me.

This incident, which fortunately ended so happily, shows how even the best-equipped party can come to grief on the summit in snow conditions. The careful mountaineer always treats these conditions with the greatest respect. If one is caught out on the summit in winter with a change of weather, the wisest course is to get down as fast as one can. This is because the passes, the only way of descending the mighty wall of the Drakensberg, are few and far between, and it is extremely difficult to find them in mist or in a snowstorm. These storms can last for days, and if your food gives out, you could be in trouble. There have been many cases where climbers, through being caught out on the summit in snow, have come within an ace of death, and have been rescued only in the nick of time. We have already referred to the Christensen tragedy in Chapter 9.

But Christensen and his fellow students were not the only ones out in the snow on that bitter night of 29 April 1959. Two other young men, Ken Leahmere Oertel and Nick Segal, had set out at the same time to walk from Cathedral Peak to Mont-aux-Sources. They were caught in the same storm. They staggered on, lost their way in the swirling snow, their food gave out, until eventually they stumbled into the hut at Mont-aux-Sources, more dead than alive. Fortunately the search party looking for Christensen had just taken over occupation of the hut, and they were able to give them shelter and food.

A few suggestions might be useful here for those who plan to visit the high peaks in winter.

View from Upper Injisuthi Cave after a snow storm

Malcolm Pearse

First of all, make sure you are carrying plenty of warm clothing and plenty of food. If you plan a 10-day trip, take reserve food for another two or three days. This need not be anything elaborate — some highly concentrated, light-weight balanced food, like Pronutro, which doesn't have to be cooked, or a few extra slabs of chocolate — enough to keep body and soul together in an emergency. A small benzine pressure stove, or a miniature gas stove, is invaluable, for in heavy snow fuel is next to impossible to find. Excellent stoves, small and light in weight, are available for high-altitude work. A groundsheet is essential for keeping moisture from reaching one's sleeping bag. A foam rubber (or closed cell) mat improves comfort, and the modern, light inflatable mats are ideal for both warmth and comfort. It is wise to carry two sleeping-bags, an inner and an outer. Modern sleeping-bags are so light that this is easily done. Even if you leave your base camp and intend returning to it that night, slip a sleeping-bag into your rucksack. If you rick your ankle you can't ring up a taxi to take you home on the summit of the Drakensberg! And remember: at all costs keep your party together. *Never* separate, even for a short while.

Ice clings to a rockface Malcolm Pearse

Remember, too, that the great killer on the summit is not cold, but *cold plus wind plus moisture.* Your body can withstand tremendous degrees of cold, but if the cold is accompanied by wind, you will quickly succumb without adequate protection. Make sure you have windproof outer clothing with you. If you have to sleep out in the snow, choose a position sheltered from the wind. On a number of occasions I have survived with ease a night out in the snow, with no tent to cover me, simply by building a snow-wall round my sleeping place. If you have no foam rubber mattress, an excellent idea is to lay down a carpet of the twiggy bush that grows so luxuriantly on the summit, *Helichrysum bilineatum.* It is easily gathered, provides a soft springy bed and excellent insulation from the cold ground. (It is this bush which is your only source of fuel on the summit.) Get into your double sleeping-bags, and you will sleep like a king for 12 solid hours. If the weather is fine you will need no roof over your head. In a snowstorm, your best hope, if you have no tent, is either a cave or a rock overhang. Caves on the summit, unlike the Little Berg, are few and far between (it is wise to pinpoint these, incidentally, on a good map before you start your trip) but overhangs can usually be found. Try somewhere along the escarpment edge for these. They are more numerous there. Remember that everything will freeze during the night. Boots and socks are the main problem, for they are sure to get wet during your day's march through the snow, and in the morning will be stiff with ice, delaying your departure for anything up to a couple of hours, if you do nothing to protect them. If you are landed with frozen boots and socks in the morning try pounding them with a stone. A better plan, though, is to protect them during the night. Slip them inside your sleeping-bag when you turn in, together with anything else you are likely to need in the morning, such as your waterbottle and essential medicines.

If you observe these few simple precautions you need never fear anything the summit can do to you in winter — and you will have the time of your life! It is the person who goes up to the top inadequately equipped, with no reserves of food or warm clothing, who lands in trouble. I have always been interested in extreme cold, and its effect on the human body. I have found that not only are one's physical responses slowed, but one's mental processes also become dulled. I once slept out near the summit of Champagne Castle, at an altitude of 3 355 m, in the middle of winter, with two companions. We built a snow wall round our sleeping spot, and we all slept well. But next morning we tried to pack in a howling gale, blowing straight off the snow. I have never known such cold in all my life. Someone suggested a mug of hot coffee. It seemed an excellent idea, and after a tremendous battle we managed to get a fire going. After a lot of coaxing the billy was boiling. Each man was given a mugful of steaming coffee, but it was too hot to drink immediately, so we placed the mugs on a rock to cool off a bit. All three of us clean forgot to drink our coffee until it was too late and the mugs had frozen over!

A frozen waterfall Helen Pearse

Adjustment to cold is a highly individual matter. There have been many cases of climbers exposed all night on mountainsides in sub-zero temperatures. Some die, while others, in the same party, survive with little or no adverse effects. During the Korean War thousands of soldiers suffered cold injuries, while others, exposed to the same conditions, suffered no ill effects. Some years ago it was noted that Australian Aborigines could sleep naked all night in temperatures close to freezing, while Europeans, even covered with a couple of blankets, could not sleep at all. It is also known that one can condition oneself to cold. I am quite sure that cold baths throughout the year are a tremendous help in this direction[1]. It is well known that one always feels the cold more at the beginning of winter, before the body has become adjusted to the lower temperatures.

Icicles a metre long Malcolm Pearse

But cold, or rather hypothermia, which means a lowering of the

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[1] Once in mid-winter, while staying with Reg and Edith Pearse at Emkhizweni, I awoke early one morning to the sound of footsteps crunching across the frost-encrusted lawn. I lifted the curtain and looked out to see Reg, in swimming trunks and with towel over his shoulder, strolling to the swimming pool. He swam a length or two of the pool before towelling himself dry and strolling back to the house. It was only when, nearly 90, he was warned by his doctor that the severe cold could cause him to have a heart attack, that he gave up the habit. — JB

Camping on the escarpment in winter, in dark and cold conditions Malcolm Pearse

temperature of the body's inner core, can be a subtle and diabolical killer. One should never underestimate it. To beat it, one should know a little about those bodily processes which are set in motion when extreme cold strikes.

When one is exposed to extreme cold the body responds, first of all, by constricting the blood vessels of the outer skin, with the result that less blood flows to the surface to be chilled. This warmer blood is then concentrated in those vital internal organs, which are thus protected from harm. Frost-bite, in its early stages at least, is therefore one of those protective devices of nature.

The body, having done all that it can to conserve its heat, now sets about producing heat at a greater rate, so as to replace any heat that is lost. The heart beats faster, additional adrenalin is pumped into the blood, and the metabolic rate rises. All these result in greater heat. We feel stimulated. The cold is "bracing", we say.

Then, as the temperature continues to drop, other mechanisms are brought into play. The muscles begin to contract spasmodically, and we "shiver". Again the result is the production of heat. But shivering also consumes a great deal of energy. If the shivering is intense and prolonged, it can result in exhaustion.

So far the temperature of the body's inner core has not been affected. But if the heat loss continues, these organs will begin to be affected, and the temperature of the body will soon drop below 37 °C (99 °F) until it reaches about 23 °C (78 °F), when death supervenes.

One of the interesting effects of extreme cold is the effect on the emotions. Moderate cold is exhilarating: extreme cold is exhausting. Fits of depression are common, one becomes irritable, there is a loss of judgement, and also, as we have seen, of memory. Members of a climbing team should be aware of these dangers. If they are all aware of them, and take them into account, it is easier to maintain amicable relations.

What causes hypothermia? It is not cold alone, as we have seen. Many a person has survived extreme cold with no ill effects, while others have succumbed when the temperature was well above zero. Apparently it is caused by a combination of four factors. None of these alone, with the possible exception of the first, will prove fatal. In combination they can be lethal. These four factors are: cold (not necessarily extreme); wetness; wind; and personal pre-conditions, for example being particularly susceptible to cold, or in an exhausted condition.

Wind, combined with cold, is certainly one of the biggest contributing factors in cases of hypothermia. Worst of all, and a real killer, is a combination of cold, wind and wetness. More fatalities are ascribed to this cause than to any other.

To survive on the summit, therefore, in a blizzard becomes a problem of avoiding these combinations.

Taking the question of cold, first of all, every effort should be made not only to conserve what bodily heat we have, but to build up reserve supplies of heat, or rather, to replace those supplies of heat that have been lost. Some loss of heat, of course, is inevitable. It is when heat is being conducted away more rapidly than it is being produced, that trouble arises.

Clothing, first of all, must be adequate. Wool is excellent, but this must be supplemented by wind- and rain-proof outer clothing. Remember that the head is the greatest source of loss of heat from radiation. It is an old climbers' maxim: "If your feet are cold, put on your hat." Always cover your head in extreme cold, preferably with a balaclava cap. Most anoraks have attached hoods, which are excellent. Inner clothing must not be too tight. Make it wool if you can, and remember that the main idea is to establish an insulating layer of warm air around your body. There are now also some excellent thermal garments made from insulating artificial fibres.

Body heat is derived from two sources — food and muscular activity. Keep nibbling. Sweets, especially chocolate (the hard black variety) are excellent. Intake of hot liquids will also help considerably.

Exercise is essential. Even moderate exercise, such as hiking with a light pack, can increase heat production as much as six times. If you are holed up in a cave or tent during a blizzard, keep flexing your muscles. In 1953 Hermann Buhl, the conqueror of Nanga Parbat, one of the highest peaks in the Himalayas, spent the night of 3 July alone, on the summit of the peak, clothed in only a pair of trousers, a shirt and a thin pullover. He kept himself alive throughout the long night by tramping up and down on his lofty perch.

Wind is your worst enemy. It is amazing how quickly even a moderate breeze in cold weather can lower your body temperature. Always keep a supply of windproof clothing with you on the summit. If possible never walk with the wind in your face. Make sure you camp down at night out of the wind. It has been found that merely to wear windproof garments over wet clothing raises one's chances of survival, in cold-wet-windy conditions, five times.

But wind is made infinitely worse if your clothing is wet. Even clothing dampened by your perspiration can lower your chances. Always wear clothing next to your skin that "breathes". The thermal conductivity of water is 240 times as fast as dry clothing, even if the air is still. If it is moving, you can multiply this figure several times. When clothing is wet it no longer provides that insulating layer of warm air next to the skin that is so essential, and heat is rapidly conducted away from the body. Here wool is your best friend. It has the peculiar power of drying from within, and is the only fabric that can provide warmth even when wet.

One or two further safeguards might be mentioned, before we discuss the treatment of hypothermia. First of all, don't wait to feel cold before putting on protective clothing. Warm clothing will not produce heat: it merely conserves already existing heat. Secondly, check periodically fingers and nose, for frost-bite, both your own and those of your companions. The symptoms are lack of feeling and white patches. And, lastly, if you are in heavy snow, don't put off your night's bivouac until you are exhausted. Camp down in plenty of time, while you still have all your faculties about you.

In the treatment of hypothermia, remember, first of all, never to attempt the time-worn remedy of rubbing frost-bitten areas with snow. This remedy is quite fallacious. You will do far more harm than good, and will add to the likelihood of permanent injury. The best treatment is to rewarm the frost-bitten area rapidly in warm water of 40 °C. Failing this, use body heat to save the injured area — put your fingers under your armpits, cover your nose with your hands, and so on.

After that, treatment falls under two headings. First, prevent any further loss of heat, and secondly, add heat to rewarm the victim's body. Make your patient as warm as possible. Place him out of the wind, and replace wet clothing with warm, dry clothing. Then put him into a sleeping-bag — but not a cold one. Try and heat the bag as much as you can beforehand. One good way is to put another member of the party into the bag beforehand. This person should strip down to his underclothing so as to transfer as much of his own body heat to the bag as possible. Another good way is to put another person into the bag with the victim. If there is no sleeping-bag available, get two people, one on each side, to huddle up against him. Give him warm fluids to drink, and sweetened foods. Remember that carbohydrates are the foods that are most quickly transformed into heat and energy. Don't give alcohol.

Despite the legendary St Bernard's dog with his keg of whisky, this can cause complications. Alcohol is sometimes administered in the mistaken belief that it will warm up the body. This is quite wrong. What it does is to cause a sudden release of cold blood from the surface vessels to the body's core, which is thus chilled. As we have seen, however, one of the essential things is to ensure that these internal organs remain warm. Also, alcohol thins the blood, and this, too, results in heat loss.

With these few simple precautions you should be 100 per cent safe on the summit of the Drakensberg. Even so, always remember that the unpredictable can happen, and be ready for it when it comes. I have already given one instance of this. Here is another which occurred in the early summer of 1970, when two journalists, Terry Baron and Rob Linden, set out to hike from Mont-aux-Sources to Cathedral Peak. For seven days they were held up in a freak blizzard, and nearly lost their lives.

They set out from the Mountain Club hut at Mont-aux-Sources in high spirits, with food for about six days. At the Mnweni Cutback, however, their troubles started. (It is strange that from this point their story has many similarities with Malcolm's own adventure.) Here the sky suddenly darkened with heavy clouds, and the air became eerily still, with a sultry, malevolent warmth. With a prickly feeling of fear the two men realised, almost unconsciously, that they were heading for real danger. They decided to make for the escarpment edge, and to try and get down into the Little Berg, but it was too late. Before they reached the edge snow started to fall.

It fell slowly at first, but it was soon swirling down, thick and fast, and the temperature plummeted. Then the wind began to howl and knife through their clothing, and they realised, with visibility down to a few metres, that they would never reach the escarpment, and that their only hope was to pitch camp. With the banshee howl of the wind around them, tearing at their clothing, they managed to get the tent up.

For five days they were held up in the storm, unable to move. Periodically they had to go outside to shovel the fallen snow off their tiny tent, but so bitter was the cold that they could only remain outside for a few minutes. They lost track of time. They were wet through and their tent leaked. Their benzine came to an end, and their food gave out. They rationed themselves to a mouthful of dried meat and a teaspoon of sugar a day, until at last even this petered out, and they were reduced to a tot of whisky and a teaspoon of sugar every 24 hours. And always the demon howl of the wind and the tent shuddering under the hammer-blows of the storm.

At last there came a lull, and the wind dropped. They woke up on the sixth day to find scudding clouds above them, a pale sun trying to break through, and around them the utter silence of vast snowfields.

They were able at last to break camp and to start their hunt for the escarpment edge and a pass. But their troubles were not over. In the heavy snowdrifts the going was painfully slow and exhausting. Terry Baron was hit by snowblindness, and had to cling on to a strap of Rob's rucksack, following blindly. Then the mist came down again, and they gave up hope. By the middle of the afternoon they were finished and had to pitch camp. Next day it was raining, but they still battled on, getting weaker and weaker. At last, unknown to themselves, they struck the very head of Ntonjelana Pass, just north of the Cathedral Range, and started down. Suddenly two bearded figures in heavy anoraks and balaclavas loomed up out of the mist in front of them. Their troubles were over. Their rescuers were two members of the Natal Mountain Club Rescue Team, who had been alerted when the men had been reported overdue.

I know of no more lovely time in the Drakensberg than when the snow comes and possesses the earth. In summer the peaks have a hard bright beauty, stencilled starkly against a turquoise sky, with the clouds breaking around them in a splendour of white foam. In autumn they have a softer, more dream-like quality, as they gaze down timelessly into the sun-drenched valleys of the Little Berg. But when the snows come that whole expanse of mountain splendour is sheathed in purest white, glistening in the clean sunlight, the snowfields stretch to the far horizon, and the peaks stand tranquil and proud over it all.

Snow can come to the Drakensberg at any month of the year. Many years ago they had a white Christmas at Cathedral Peak Hotel. While the Boer wagons were descending the Drakensberg, in early January 1838, the Voortrekkers reported that the whole range was covered in "silver-white" snow. But this is rare. Usually it is when April begins to give way to May that one can expect the first snows to fall, and they will last until well into September, and even October.

It is a strange new world that you will enter as you step out into the snow, and you must learn to adjust yourself to it. The first thing that you will notice is the silence. I know of no silence like it. So hushed is the air that even the sound of your boot scraping on a hidden rock, or the tinkle of an ice-pinnacle as it melts in the sun, is an intrusion and a desecration. If you are lucky, and the bitter cold of night has frozen the surface of the snow, you will be able to walk for many kilometres on the smooth, creamed surface in an elation of spirit you have never known before. But if the snow is only partly frozen, and deep, then the crust will break under your weight every few steps, and you will fall in, and flounder, and lose your balance, and your carefully worked out schedule for the day will go by the board. I once timed myself on the slopes below Cleft Peak. It took me an hour to cover 100 m, and after that I gave up!

When the sun shines, it is still cold, of course, but the air is crisp, and the sunlight a warm benediction, and you can go all day in shorts and bare legs, but once the sun goes you will pile on every stitch of clothing you have. At night there is only one thing to do — climb right into your double sleeping-bag and remain there for 16 hours, for there is hardly any fuel on the summit, only the twiggy *Helichrysum trilineatum*, and fires are out of the question.

Another of your problems is water. There is plenty of it around, but it is all frozen! Even the larger streams are solid ice, and they will remain so for months on end. You will have to obtain water by melting the snow, but this is not easy, for, as we have said, fuel is scarce and every twig precious. To obtain one billy-can of water you will have to collect from several billy-cans of snow. Weather experts will tell you 10 inches of fresh snow can contain between as little as 0.1 inches and four inches of water, depending on crystal structure, wind speed, temperature, and other factors — or the difference between "dry" and "wet" snow. Most snow in the United States, for example, falls with a water-to-snow ratio of between 0.04 and 0.10. The best way to melt snow is to put a couple of centimetres of water in the billy-can and then adding snow a little at a time. This will prevent the bottom of the pot scorching before the snow melts.

Always there is the problem that anything liquid will freeze solid during the night, even if it is kept in your tent. Eggs, milk, butter and medicines will all be unusable in the morning. Damp clothing will be turned into sheets of crackling armour, boots and stockings will be iron blocks. And don't expect the sun to melt them in the morning. There is no heat in the sun until at least 10 am.

But in spite of the bitter cold, perhaps because of it, some of my most treasured memories are of the summit under snow ... memories of the day we found a gigantic frozen waterfall on the southern slopes of Champagne Castle, at least 15 m high; memories of the ice-grotto we explored below Mount Amery; and of that long, exhilarating march over frozen snow, from the Upper Injisuthi Cave to the Langalibalele Pass, after the great snowstorm of 1953. And memories, too, of that never-to-be-forgotten trip to the summit in July 1957, with my daughter Joan, who was just out of Training College. The early days of that month had seen one of the heaviest falls of snow ever to be recorded in the Drakensberg, and the authorities had had to close the whole of the summit area in the Royal Natal National Park to the public. We were the first to be allowed up after conditions had returned to normal, but we were warned to be careful.

Joan and I set off with a young African to carry her pack, for she was new to the game, but he collapsed at Basuto Gate and had to be sent home, and I had to shoulder his pack as well as my own. The chain ladder was still iced up, and we only just made the hut before darkness fell, the whole summit area a white wilderness of untrodden snow. In the early hours of the morning three young men stumbled into the hut after a nightmare climb through the icy night, having lost half their kit in the snow-drifts. That was my first meeting with "Tiny" Harries, the man who, eight years later, was to build Emkhizweni for us when we came to live out in the Drakensberg. We teamed up with "Tiny" (nearly 2 m tall!) and his half-section, Tim (the third man just couldn't take it, and vanished immediately after breakfast that first morning!) and the four of us spent two magnificent days tobogganing down those glorious snow slopes in brilliant sunlight. We ended up by deciding, at 2 pm on our last day, to climb Sentinel Peak, and getting back to the caravan park well after midnight, nearly famished, with Joan, weary as she must have been, setting to and rustling up a magnificent steaming meal of poached eggs, bacon and coffee for the four of us, at 2 am.

It is memories such as these that bring a glow to the heart in the days when, as the Preacher in Ecclesiastes said, the years draw nigh, and strong men bow themselves, and desire fails, because man goeth to his long home[1].

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[1] Book of Ecclesiastes 12:1, 3, 5

PART THREE

Tells of peace and war, and the folly of man,
whereby he stands in peril of losing his heritage

CHAPTER 15

THE GEOGRAPHY OF HOPE - I

God made wild animals, and He saw that it was good.
Book of Genesis (New English Bible)

Some years ago Wallace Stegner, Professor of English at Stanford University, wrote these noble words:

> Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed, if we permit the last virgin forests to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette-cases; if we drive the few remaining members of the wild species into zoos or to extinction; if we pollute the last clean air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads to the last of the silence, so that never again will people be free in their own country from the noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste, and so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong to it. We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in, for it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity, as creatures, as part of the geography of hope ...

Part of the Geography of Hope!

The Drakensberg is, above all else, a place of peace. But if I were an artist, and had been given the task of painting a picture to be called "Peace, perfect peace", I would not paint that mountain vlei I came across early one morning, high up in the Setene valley, with the peaks mirrored in glass-like perfection on its tranquil, unbroken surface, nor would I paint the stillness and the silence of the great snowfields. I would paint the green slopes of a sheltered valley in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve, with the grass undulating softly in the morning breeze, and the clouds beginning their long march across the skies, and in a quiet corner a party of graceful oribi feeding on the rich grass, "studying to be quiet, and doing their own business". For you will not find true peace in engraven stillness, nor in your ivory tower. True peace is to be found only in the heart of teeming life.

And I believe you would have to go a long way to find a more perfect home of peace and serenity than you would find in the hills and valleys of the Drakensberg, where the creatures of the wild have found a refuge, and where they go about their business in quiet contentment.

Sadly, the game is not as numerous as it used to be. When the first white men moved up into the heart of the Drakensberg the mountains were alive with game. Here they found a land of deep, well-watered soil, of mountain flowers, of sheltered valleys where the grass stood tall and strong, and where ice-cold streams watered the earth. Today this part of it is much the same. The grass is not quite so tall, but the valleys still dream in the sunlight, the clean winds still blow over the high places, and the peaks still dominate the sky, proud and aloof in their invulnerable kingdom. I doubt whether a single flower species has disappeared with the march of time.

But one thing certainly has changed. No longer will you find the mountain foothills alive with game. The cheetah and the leopard, the lion and the rhinoceros, the elephant and the buffalo — all have gone their way down the corridors of the unremembered past. Perhaps that is why, when you do come across some of the few remaining wild animals in these mountain solitudes, the sight catches you by the throat, and your heart beats with a strange delight, and you feel a kinship with the great world of nature that is deeper even than your kinship with your fellow men.

Writer after writer in the mid-1800s refers to the vast herds of game that were to be found in the Midlands of Natal and along the slopes of the Drakensberg. Charles Barter, writing in 1852 of the area between Harrismith and the Drakensberg, refers to "game in thousands, aye, and tens of thousands, spread over the plains or marching in almost endless line across its surface". The traveller James Chapman, skirting the "lofty range of the Drakensberg" in 1849 wrote: "At certain times of the day the plains for miles around had somewhat the appearance of a living ocean, the tumultuous waves being formed by the various herds crossing and recrossing each other in every direction." The springbok treks, when countless thousands of springbok trekked over the vast plains of the Free State, were well known and well documented. Davie and Gibbons, writing of the area around Prieska in 1888, estimated that 10 000 springbok could stand on an acre, and that 10 000 acres were covered by a moving mass of *trekbokke* as far as the eye could see on all sides. There must have been 100 million animals. Quagga, wildebeest, zebra, lion, elephant, buffaloes, leopards, hippopotami, and countless herds of antelopes are all mentioned. An old farmer once told Carter Robinson that the game used to come down into Natal from the Orange Free State in thousands in the 1860s during April and May, trekking into the warmer Thornveld. They would take all day to pass one single point. In September they returned.

By the late 1860s all this had begun to change. The game was shot out, first in the areas around the developing towns, and then in the outlying parts, until eventually the remote fastnesses of the Drakensberg were invaded by the hunter and his gun. Men hunted for the sheer lust of killing. The genuine hunter hunted only for the pot; the trophy hunter hunted selectively for better and better trophies; the butchers — and there were hundreds of them — hunted mercilessly and relentlessly, and only to kill ...

The last elephant was shot in Durban in July 1850, but they survived in the Pinetown district until 1867, when the last one fell to the gun of John Coote Field (after whom Field's Hill is named). He and Captain Spencer Drake shot the last lion in the same district in 1855. By 1856 the last lion had been shot in the Karkloof district, but a few still survived in the remoter areas. The traveller John Shedden Dobie saw lion spoor "immediately under the perpendicular cliffs of Champagne Castle" (he probably meant Cathkin Peak) in 1863, and says that three lions had been seen in the Cathkin area a few days previously. Elephants seem to have survived longer. It is said that the last elephant in Natal was shot by Thys Marais on the site of the present Wagendrift Dam, near Estcourt, in 1875, though Henry Brooks, writing in 1876, said that elephants were still to be found in the uThukela valley. In Zululand there were a few elephant in the vicinity of Lake St Lucia until 1901, and a solitary bull survived in Imfolozi until 1913. But by 1880 all the larger mammals had gone, and with them went the quagga, zebra, oribi and wildebeest. Today the quagga is extinct, and only the lonely figure of the black wildebeest on the KwaZulu-Natal coat of arms remains to remind the people of the province of their former glory.

Leopards still remain in the Drakensberg, but they are shy, nocturnal animals, so sightings are rare. Bill Barnes's rangers in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve came across leopard spoor in a remote side valley of the Mchesana River in the early 1970s, and there are persistent rumours that a leopard has his lair in the gorge of the Sterkspruit valley, less than 5 km from my home. Hendrik Martens, in the early 1940s, quite definitely heard its distinctive grunts and roars.

Carter Robinson, up to the time of his death in 1970, was convinced there were leopards in the Drakensberg. A few years ago my friend Harry Barker spent a night in Cat Cave, in the upper reaches of the uMhlwazini River. During the night he heard a heavy body crashing through the undergrowth, and the unmistakable grunts and coughs of a leopard. Natal Parks Board staff recorded sightings of the animals as recently as 1985 and 1986.

But although the big game has disappeared, the Drakensberg still offers a home to many of the lesser creatures, and to those who love the wild things of nature these mountain solitudes are a perpetual source of wonder and delight. These creatures range from the trap-door spider to the noble eland, from the tiny sunbird to the lordly lammergeier, and all you need to enjoy them are eyes to see and the spirit of wonder.

Perhaps the most delightful of all wild animals to be found in the Drakensberg are the various species of antelope. There are 10 of these altogether and you would be unfortunate to go for even a short walk in one of the game reserves without encountering at least a pair of these lovely animals.

Sometimes, as you set off on your hike, especially in the early morning, you will hear a short cough or grunt. Look carefully, and on the opposite slope you will very likely see a group of animals of a greyish-brown colour, a little larger than a goat, with long, slender necks, long pointed ears, and straight, sharp horns. These are almost certainly grey rhebok, *Pelea capreolus*, or vaalribbok, as they are called in Afrikaans. They will soon be off, loping up the mountainside with their peculiar rocking horse gait, with the hindquarters thrown up into the air at each stride. In flight their tails are held erect, showing white "powder-puff" undersides, which with the animals' grey colour and straight horns make identification of the species easy. Grey rhebok are browsers, and love the higher mountain regions, where they are usually found in family parties of from two to ten. Their hearing, eyesight and sense of smell are all acute, and the first indication you will have of their presence is the short alarm cough. They move extremely swiftly when alarmed. Only the male carries horns, and these are 20 to 25 cm long. The grey rhebok is a direct descendent of one of the earliest races of antelope, and has inhabited the Drakensberg for as long as we know.

Grey rhebok John Hone

Mountain reedbuck Philip van den Berg

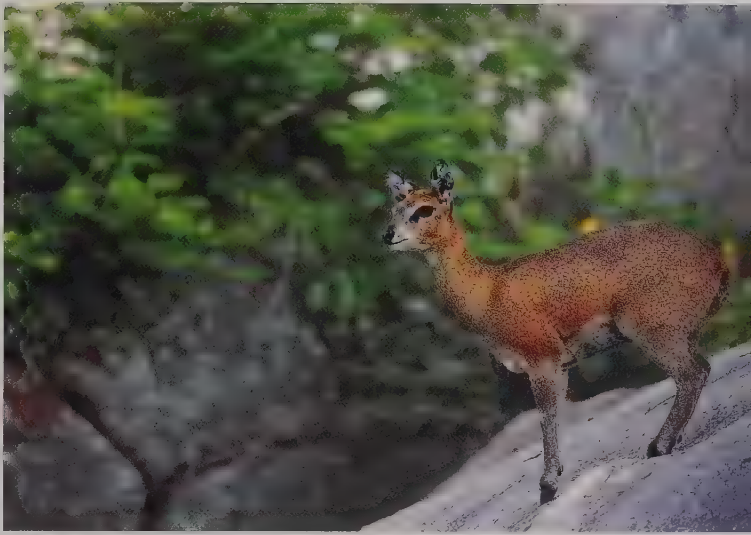
Very similar to the grey rhebok is his cousin, the mountain reedbuck, or rooiribbok, *Redunca fulvorufula* (Zulu: *Inxala*). Though only distantly related, the two are, superficially, very similar. They are about the same size, but the mountain reedbuck, as its Afrikaans name implies, has a reddish-grey coat, with white on the chest, throat and abdomen, and under the tail, while the grey rhebok is greyish-brown. The black horns of the male mountain reedbuck are lyre-shaped and curve forward rather than being straight. Unlike the grey rhebok, the mountain reedbuck does not like the bleak summits of the Little Berg. He prefers the warm, sunny slopes and the sheltered gullies, and is often found among the scattered proteas and bottlebrushes on the warm, northern slopes of the Little Berg, in pairs or in small parties of five or six to a dozen. If he thinks he has not been seen, the mountain reedbuck will remain lying down in the long grass. While the grey rhebok likes to run up a slope, the mountain reedbuck will either run round or obliquely down a hill. The action of the two species in running is very similar, but the tail of the reedbuck is always fan-spread, and kept tucked in, though occasionally it is "flashed", in which case it appears large and white. The alarm note is a short, sharp whistle rather than a grunt, and it carries over long distances. The mountain reedbuck is closely related to the common reedbuck, *Redunca arundinum* (Zulu: *Intlangu*). In fact the young ewes of the two species are almost indistinguishable. The reedbuck is a little larger than his mountain cousin, growing to a height of 90 to 100 cm. He is seen in a variety of habitats, generally in open marshy reedbeds, as his name implies, but also in fairly well-wooded areas, usually near water. The horns are wide and U-shaped, curving back and then forward, and the colour is tawny to reddish-buff, while the undersides, including the tail, are white. They are usually found singly or in pairs, and even if several individuals do come together, they will scatter in different directions if disturbed. Like the grey rhebok and mountain reedbuck, they run with a rocking horse gait, tail held erect, showing the white undersides. Once they reach the cover of trees, they will often stand stockstill and watch for several minutes before bolting off again. They are not often seen, as they are night feeders, and in the daytime are adept at hiding themselves in reeds and long grasses. They will often lie hidden until almost trodden on, before jumping up and making off.

The reedbuck is a smooth grey in colour, with black or dark brown stripes on the lower part of the forelimbs and similar stripes, but less well marked, on the lower hindlimbs. The tail is thick and bushy, and the ears long and sharply pointed. Like their mountain cousins, their alarm call is a shrill whistle.

In the higher mountain regions you will, if you are lucky, catch a glimpse of the klipspringer, *Oreotragus oreotragus* (Zulu: *Igogo*). It is extremely rare in the Drakensberg, and is sometimes mistaken for the grey rhebok. However, it is much smaller, growing to about 60 cm. He is a true mountaineer, and loves the rocks and the high mountain slopes. The hooves are highly specialised, and ideally suited for rock-climbing. They are small and blunt, and this enables the klipspringer to run with amazing sure-footedness up steep rock faces. He walks on the tips of these hooves, giving the impression of walking on stilts. The horns, rather wide apart and curving slightly forward at the tips, are short. His coat is yellowish-olive in colour and blends perfectly with the rocks among which he lives. The ears are large, and the head is triangular and pointed. He has only the vestige of a tail. Like the reedbuck, his call is a shrill whistle, and when alarmed he will emit this before bounding up the rocks. Once he thinks he is safe, however, he will pause on the skyline to look back at his pursuer. They are confined to the basalt layers of the main Drakensberg and are never seen in the Little Berg.

The klipspringer has glands in front of the eyes which emit a secretion, and some observers have noted that the animal often rubs this secretion off on to plants of a suitable height. Although the function of this secretion is not fully understood, it has been suggested that it may be how males define their territories.

Klipspringer were once very common, but unfortunately the early settlers soon discovered that the animal's short, bristly hair was ideal for stuffing saddles, and they were soon shot out. Not only so, but the venison is sweet and tender, and their habit of standing stock-still against the skyline on top of a mountain crag makes them an easy target for the hunter's gun. They seem to lack the wariness of other antelopes, perhaps believing that once they have gained height above their pursuers, they are safe.



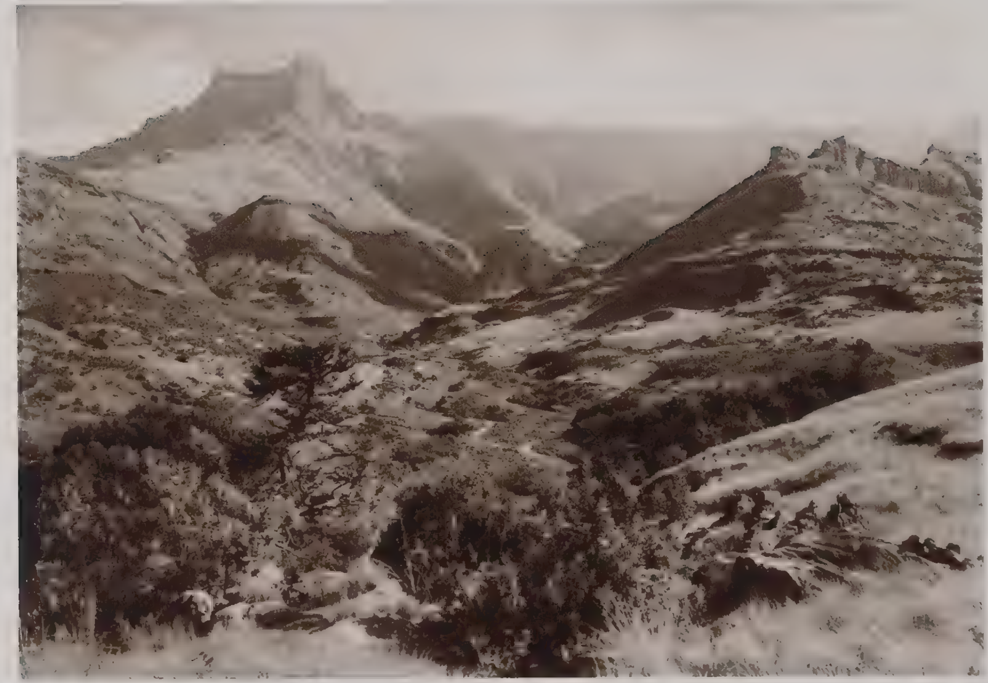
Klipspringer

Roger de la Harpe

Among the wild creatures of the mountain slopes there is one who is a particular friend of mine, for he visited us regularly in the winter. His name is *Sylvicapra grimmia*, otherwise the common duiker. During the summer months he gave our garden a wide berth, but in winter, when the grass was brown and there was little to eat in the veld, he visited us every night. In the morning we would find his little hoofmarks in our flowerbeds, and we surveyed ruefully the wreck he made of the violas and the pansies and the rose bushes.

The duiker is a solitary little fellow, and has shown a tremendous capacity to survive in fairly densely populated areas. In the Mnweni area of the Drakensberg he is one of the few antelopes to have survived.

He is a nocturnal feeder, and is seldom seen, though I have often picked him up in the headlights of our car when returning to our home late at night. He is uniformly grey in colour, and grows to a height of about 65 cm. The horns are straight and spike-like, only about 15 cm long and are set well back on the head. Between the horns of the male there is a characteristic tuft of hair. On the female, which seldom has horns, this



Malcolm Pearse

Hiking Country

A path is visible in this photograph of the Royal Natal National Park. It will guide hikers on an fairly easy walk around the base of the Policeman's Helmet and almost to the very base of the mighty wall of the Amphitheatre gives a sort of "unicorn" appearance. Duikers are mainly browsers, and feed on leaves, twigs, berries and wild fruits. The name duiker comes from the Afrikaans, and means diver, referring to the plunging, leaping run of the animal as it flees. He has two cousins, the blue duiker and the red duiker, neither of which is found in the Drakensberg.

A bushbuck doe Wendy Dennis

If you penetrate any of the forests of the Drakensberg, you will sometimes hear a short, sharp bark, followed by a few crashes, and then silence. This is sure to be a bushbuck, *Tragelaphus scriptus*. Together with the reedbuck, he is the largest of the antelopes we have considered so far, apart from the eland. The males, growing to a height of 100 cm, are dark brown, with a white bar across the throat. The ram carries a large pair of horns, spirally twisted. Females carry no horns, and are more reddish than the males. They are solitary animals, although pairs may sometimes be seen. If cornered or wounded, the bushbuck male can be dangerous, especially in the mating season, and has been known to fight to the death in rivalry for females. They are only to be found in bush country, and are largely nocturnal, though they are sometimes seen in the early morning and late afternoon.

With his bright reddish colour, white markings on neck, abdomen, chest, legs and round the eyes, pointed ears, slender neck and erect head, the oribi, *Ourebia ourebi*, is a strikingly handsome animal. He has a short, black-tipped tail, and when standing his back is always perfectly horizontal. They are usually found in pairs or small family groups, often in long grass. Here the oribi will often lie concealed, watching you approach, waiting until the last moment, when he will suddenly jump up and make off at tremendous speed, leaping high in the air every now and then, always landing on his hind legs. He will not run far, however. After 100 m or so he will stop, turn round, and face the area behind him. His alarm call is a soft wheezy whistle.

The oribi is very similar to the steenbok (not found in the Drakensberg), and is often mistaken for it. Oribi were once common throughout the Berg areas, but today are rare. If you are lucky enough to see one it would probably be in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve, the Kamberg or Lotheni Nature Reserves.

Oribi are incurably curious. If you are lying down well concealed, with just your head or hat showing, and the wind in the right direction, an oribi will edge forward cautiously, a metre or so at a time, to inspect the strange object. He will stare hard for a moment, utter a squeak and jump back, and then cautiously advance another pace or two. Make the slightest movement, however, and he will be off, heels high in the air.

These seven antelope — the grey rhebok, mountain reedbuck, reedbuck, klipspringer, common duiker, bushbuck and oribi — are the main antelope species which you are likely to see in the Drakensberg, apart from the remnants of the re-introduced red hartebeest and blesbok. But there is one other possible species. This could be the grysbok. There is no certainty, however, that this species inhabits the Drakensberg. We do know that there was a small red antelope inhabiting a few of the deep valleys of the Drakensberg, which had been seen only rarely, and the remains of a carcass found some years ago seemed to indicate that it might be a grysbok. But there is no certainty. Like the bushbuck, the grysbok inhabits bush country. He is small and speckled grey in appearance. The ram has short straight horns.

Apart from the larger animals that you could see in the Drakensberg areas, there are hundreds of smaller ones that you will rarely, if ever, see. The Drakensberg is a naturalist's paradise, but so often we have eyes that see not, and ears that hear not, and only the trained observer will know where to look and what to look for. Of these are the various species of snakes, which we shall deal with in the next chapter; the otter (*Aonyx capensis* and *Lutra maculicollis*), roaming the streams at night; the ice-rat, *Otomys sloggettii* (the summit is riddled with his burrows); the vleirat, *Otomys irroratus*; the Natal mole-rat, *Cryptomys natalensis*; the Jacot-Guillarmod's golden mole, *Chlorotalpa selateri*; the porcupine, *Hystrix africae-australis*; the lizard — the striped skink, the Drakensberg girdled lizard, and the rare yellow-throated plated lizard; the various species of rabbits and hares, and, of course, the rock dassie,

Rock dassie

Procavia capensis. Rock rabbit, as it is sometimes called, is a very bad name for this little chap, for he is a rabbit neither in looks nor habit.

He is a delightful little creature, about the size of a large guinea pig, with no tail. He is greyish-brown above, sometimes with white underparts and there is a patch of dark hair in the middle of his back. Dassies live in colonies among the rocks, and love to sun themselves on rocky outcrops, especially in the early morning. They are shy little creatures, however, and will dive for cover at the first sign of danger. Strangely enough, they are remotely related to the elephant and the rhinoceros.

In ancient times the dassie was well known as the coney. "The rocks are a refuge for the conies," sang the Psalmist. Attempts have been made to commercialise their pelts, with little success, for the fur is interspersed with long protruding bristles, which spoil it. Their flesh, however, is much prized by rural blacks, and the strange substance known as hyracium, which comes from the dassie, has medicinal properties. This is a black, pitch-like substance found in dassie haunts. Where water is unavailable dassies are capable of surviving without it, obtaining moisture from their food, with the result that their urine is not thin and limpid, but thick and glutinous. This urine is always deposited in the same spot, where it crystallises, and at one time was marketed to manufacturing chemists under the name hyracium.

The dassie is one of the finest climbers in the world. This is due to the semi-elastic rubberlike pads on the soles of his feet, which enable him to negotiate steep and often smooth cliff faces, to leap agilely from one rock to another, and to clamber about in trees. The sweating of the pads increases their traction. He has four toes on each front foot and three on each hind foot, and the hind foot has, in addition, a strong, elongated nail used for scratching and burrowing. He is also able to withstand drops from a great height. Their eyesight is excellent, and so too is their hearing, and their sense of smell is keen. I have tried for years to obtain a photograph of a dassie without success. You can remain hidden for hours at their burrows, with camera at the ready, but they seem to sense that you are there, and will not come out from their rock crevices. Incidentally, it is almost impossible to get them out of these crevices. They inflate their bodies and cling on to the rock face with their suction-pads. They also seem able to elongate their bodies, enabling them to creep through the tiniest of rock crevices. They have been known to negotiate gaps in the face of a precipice of up to 240 cm by flinging themselves across the gap and clinging to the opposite face with their foot-pads.

Dr J. du P. Bothma, of the Department of Zoology, University of Pretoria, is of the opinion that the rock dassie has three distinct calls: the short, sharp metallic bark of the sentry, the alarm call; a peculiar, high-pitched staccato squeal, uttered by youngsters; and thirdly a low-pitched, sweet-sounding, whistle-like call, used, apparently, when the dassie has been disturbed, but is not quite sure what the disturbance is, or whether it means danger.

The dassie is delightfully amusing to watch, and if you are skilful enough in hiding yourself, and do not approach too near, and have the patience of Job to wait, you will have many happy hours watching his antics on the sunwarmed rocks of his mountain home.

For myself, I shall always remember James. When Malcolm, my son, was still a schoolboy we camped one Easter in the Ntonjelana valley, making use of the cave under the shadow of South Saddle, at the foot of the Ntonjelana Pass. Each evening, after supper, we would relax on a grassy bank just outside the cave, before turning in for the night, I with my pipe. On the krantzes opposite was a family of rock dassies. Every evening, exactly 10 minutes before the sun set, a single dassie would pop up and sit perched on the highest rock, outlined against the sky, watching the sunset. He never missed once during the eight days we were there. For some reason I have forgotten, we called him James, and we watched for him every evening. Not once did he fail to appear. Three years later we were back at the same cave. As we brought our mugs of coffee out on to the grassy slope that first evening, Malcolm said, "Do you remember James, Dad? I wonder what has happened to him." We looked up, and I'm blest if James wasn't there, on top of the same rock, sniffing the evening air with his little wrinkled nose, and it was exactly 10 minutes to sunset!

You are not likely to see jackals, as they usually hunt by night. The Drakensberg jackal or black-backed jackal, *Canis mesomelas*, is perhaps the most persecuted of all wild animals because of the damage he does to the sheep industry. He stands about 50 cm high and has a long, rich reddish colour coat, with a silver and black saddle running from the neck to the base of the tail. The lips, throat and underparts are white. The tail is long and bushy.

Jackals usually go about singly or in pairs, but occasionally they hunt in small family groups. Their call is a long, wailing howl, followed by a number of yapping barks in quick succession. I know of no more spine-tingling, eerie sound in the silence of the night, when you are camping alone, and the call comes floating to you from across the moonlit valley. He has a considerable turn of speed. Travelling in a jeep in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve some years ago we put up a jackal just as dusk was falling. Although our speed was at least 45 km/h, he kept successfully ahead of us for a considerable distance.

Black-backed jackal John Hone

During the day he will lie up in long grass or scrub, or preferably in a burrow or under rocks. The pups are born in holes in the ground, disused burrows and sometimes caves or rock crevices. Each litter consists of three to four pups, though larger litters have been recorded. When the pups are no longer suckled, the parents bring food to them, either carried in the mouth or regurgitated. This ability to vomit easily makes it extremely difficult for jackals to be killed by poisoning.

Their depredations are alleged to be widespread and serious. In 1967 the Natal Agricultural Union published figures which, they claimed, showed that more than 28 000 sheep were killed in the province each year by marauding dogs and jackals. For the whole of South Africa it has been estimated that 200 000 sheep a year are killed by jackals alone. Popular opinion makes him a vicious killer. Not only does he kill, but he will maim the rest of the flock, biting off the noses and lips of his victims.

The old Natal Parks Board used to keep a pack of dogs to hunt jackal, but the pack was disbanded many years ago and the hunting of jackals in the reserves ceased. Strangely enough, some old-timers assert that jackals have only been known in the Drakensberg in comparatively recent times. Carter Robinson, who spent a lifetime in the Drakensberg, never remembers them in his early days, and Hendrik Martens, founder of the Champagne Castle Hotel, was quite certain that up to 1925 there were no jackals in the Drakensberg.

Although the leopard has almost completely disappeared from these mountain regions, there are probably a few wild cats still to be found here. It is not likely, however, that you will ever see one, for they hunt at night and lie up during the day. In all my years in the Drakensberg I have seen only one, probably a serval, which strolled past my camp at the foot of the Mnweni Pass, as dusk was approaching. The serval, *Felis serval* (Zulu: *Ndlozi*) is the largest of these cats. This fine animal has a golden-brown coat with large black spots, converging on the back and forming bars around the chest. One outstanding feature of the serval is his large, oval ears. He is about 60 cm high, and weighs about 15 kg, and is usually to be found in the thick undergrowth bordering streams. He has a high-pitched, ringing call, and it is this call which usually proclaims his presence, as he is only rarely seen. He preys on the larger game birds, small buck and rodents.

Another of the cat family to be found in the Drakensberg is the caracal, *Felis caracal*, a beautiful animal, graceful and slender but powerfully built. His long, tufted ears differentiate him from the serval, with his oval ears, and he is slightly smaller than the serval, with a height of about 40 to 45 cm at the shoulder. The colour of his coat is a bright reddish-brown.

The caracal can be savage and dangerous, especially if cornered. Like the serval, he preys on smaller buck, game birds, hares and rodents. He is also guilty of taking a heavy toll of sheep.

Much smaller than the serval and the caracal is the genet. Genets are about the size of our domesticated cat, and there are three species in South Africa. Only one of these, the large-spotted genet, *Genetta tigrina*, is found in the Drakensberg. Genets are almost exclusively nocturnal animals, with narrow, pointed faces and large conical ears. The body is elongated and lithe, and the tail fairly bushy.

The genet will inhabit any readymade shelter, often living in close association with man, and can become a nuisance to farmers. He will wreak havoc in a poultry run if ever he gets in, and is adept at squeezing through the narrowest hole in a fence. He will kill a fowl and eat only the head and fleshy portion of the breast, leaving the rest.

One of the most delightful creatures of the wild, and a never-ending source of amusement to visitors is the vervet monkey, *Cercopithecus pygerythrus*. Vervet monkeys are well known in most parts of South Africa where natural bush gives them the shelter they like. They are especially common in the bush around Durban and in Durban parks. These fascinating little creatures are fairly common throughout the Drakensberg, especially in the Cathkin area, but less so in the Cathedral area. They are usually to be found in troops, ranging from small family parties of six to a dozen and up to 40 or 50.

Vervet monkey Lanz von Horsten

The vervet is a handsome monkey, with an attractive light-grey coat, long, black-tipped tail and puckish black face. He lives usually on wild fruits, flowers, leaves, seeds and seed pods, and bulbs, but will sometimes take young birds, eggs and insects. His chief enemy is the great crowned eagle, of which he lives in mortal dread.

Large troops appear to consist of a number of "harems", each under the leadership of its own adult male. Although the members of a troop usually live amicably together, fights occasionally break out between the males. They are very agile in trees, leaping from branch to branch when pursued, and are adept at hiding themselves in the foliage. When danger threatens, the mother will take her baby into her protective arms like any human mother.

I think that of all the wild animals of the Drakensberg, the most fascinating is our old friend the chacma baboon, *Papio ursinus*. Gregarious, noisy, almost human in his antics, he is a never-failing source of interest to those who visit the Drakensberg.

Baboons usually go about in troops of between 20 and 30, wandering over a wide area, turning over stones in search of lizards and scorpions, and scampering with amazing agility over the broken ground of the Little Berg. The troop consists of baboons of all ages. When on the move, the full-grown males take up positions on the outside and in the rear. When alarmed or disturbed mothers will make off with their babies clinging to the undersides of their fur. Older children will ride like jockeys on the backs of their mothers. While they are feeding a sentry will be posted on a high point, and it is his job to warn the troop of the approach of danger. He is always easy to pick out: his tail is bent in a sort of loop, a sign of alertness.

Baboons have a fairly poor sense of smell, but their eyesight is amazingly acute, among the most acute of any South African animal. When he spots you (normally long before you can see him) he emits the loud, characteristic baboon bark, and the troop is off as hard as it can go. One rather strange fact is that baboons will always run away from danger, even though they may be in a hollow and cannot see from where the danger is coming. I have often wondered whether the sentry is able, in his bark, to indicate where the danger lies and which is the safest line of retreat.

The baboon is a powerful creature with a possible life-span of about 45 years. He is omnivorous and will eat almost anything, including grass, leaves, bulbs, wild fruits, eggs, small mammals, insects, caterpillars, prickly pears, lizards and scorpions. He will snip off the tail of the scorpion so as to avoid the burning sting. Like the vervet monkey, he has two large cheekpouches into which he will stuff food to be eaten at leisure afterwards.

He is particularly partial to honey, and a quite hilarious sight is a troop of baboons raiding a beehive. The troop first of all gathers a safe distance away from the hive, jabbering incessantly, apparently working out the plan of operations. At last a leader is elected. Watched, fascinated, by the others, he summons up his courage, dashes in, puts a paw into the nest, grabs a piece of honeycomb, and then is off on three legs, holding the honeycomb in his fourth paw. But by now the bees are after him, and they seem to know just where his bare spots are. The baboon barks and shrieks and leaps high in the air as the stings ram home, but he clings to his booty, reaches the safety of a bush, some distance away, squats behind it, and starts to tuck in, his paws and mouth soon a sticky mess. Then a second baboon darts in, and the act is repeated, to the huge delight of the rest of the troop. But by now the bees are alerted to the fact that this is not just a minor raid on the part of one baboon, but a major assault, and they sally out in force to protect their home. Now it is a free-for-all. Everyone dashes in to get his share of the booty, even mothers with babies clinging to their fur. The babies, being largely hairless, suffer badly, and their squeals add to the din. The noise is appalling — shrieks, yells, grunts, barks mingled with the menacing hum of the angry bees, as the nest is rifled and eventually broken down.

Although there is this strong social bond, quarrels do break out. And when a quarrel breaks out, all the world knows about it! The jabbering, squeals, grunts, angry barks and yells have to be heard to be believed. The language they use must be dreadful! I sometimes heard them, up in the sandstone cliffs of Wostyn above our home, a kilometre or so away. I was once climbing in the Cathedral area, many years ago, when I heard a tremendous row coming from the cliffs above me. Suddenly two baboons, locked together in a tight ball, came rolling down the slope towards me. They passed only a couple of metres from where I was sitting, viciously biting and tearing great chunks of hair out of each other, completely oblivious of my presence and of the danger of going over a precipice, intent only on settling scores with each other. They bounced and rolled out of sight, still locked together, into the depths below.

The baboon can be a vicious fighter. Farmers will tell you of terrible fights to the death between dogs and baboons. The baboon has a fearsome weapon, two large, razor-sharp incisor teeth. When the dog attacks, he will fly at the throat of the baboon. But the baboon enfolds the dog in his powerful arms, crushes him, and then starts in with his terrible teeth, ripping and slashing. Then, with his sharp fangs embedded in the dog's flesh, he will thrust the body away, tearing flesh and ripping bones apart.

When it comes to raiding agricultural land, there are few more destructive animals in the world than the baboon. When they raid a mealie field, everything goes within half an hour — mealies, pumpkins, melons, the lot, with fences ripped down and fields of wheat and lucerne trampled to give good measure. When a fowl run is raided, often not a fowl is left alive after 10 minutes.

Baboons are said to be clever enough to be able to distinguish between a man and a woman. For a woman they have nothing but contempt. Cases have been known of experienced baboons raiding lonely farmhouses when the farmer was away, taking possession of the veranda, and peering through the windows at the farmer's wife. But at the first sight of the farmer returning, they are off. Stranger still, if a man dresses in a woman's clothes in order to approach them, they will spot it immediately, and again are off. But if a woman, dressed in riding breeches, boots and a jacket approaches, she will be completely ignored. A small boy will scare them, but not a grown-up woman.

Baboons have two deadly enemies, leopards and pythons. The leopard is stealthy and cunning. He attacks just before sunset, as the baboons are going to their sleeping places. He singles out a lone baboon, and ambushes it. Without a sound, he leaps on his prey, and bites it in one of two places, either in the neck, or in the spine on the small of the back. If he bites in the neck, death follows immediately. If it is in the spine, the hindquarters are paralysed. But in either case, the leopard immediately flees to a place of safety, for he knows the troop will counter-attack. High on an inaccessible ledge, he looks down, snarling viciously, and below the baboons gather, and jabber, and roar defiance, until darkness sets in, and the baboons retreat, for they fear the dark. Then the leopard descends, and advances silently on his paralysed prey. One terrifying roar, a single leap in the dark, and it is all over. He knows that the baboons will not attack in the night.

You will sometimes hear climbers in the Drakensberg say that baboons have rolled stones down on them from the cliffs above. I doubt that this has ever been done with any aggressive intent. Baboons have a well-known habit of turning stones over in their search for insects, spiders and scorpions, and if this happens at the edge of a precipice, some are sure to roll over. I can confirm this. Some years ago I was climbing the slopes of Champagne Castle, heading for Gray's Pass. Just before one enters the pass proper, one has to skirt the foot of some high cliffs on the left. On top of these cliffs was a troop of baboons, and as I made my way along the base, several stones came rolling down, one narrowly missing me. When I arrived at the top of the pass, I circled back to the top of the cliffs, and it was quite obvious what had happened. The baboons had been feeding. Stones were overturned, bulbs uprooted, and the grass trampled.

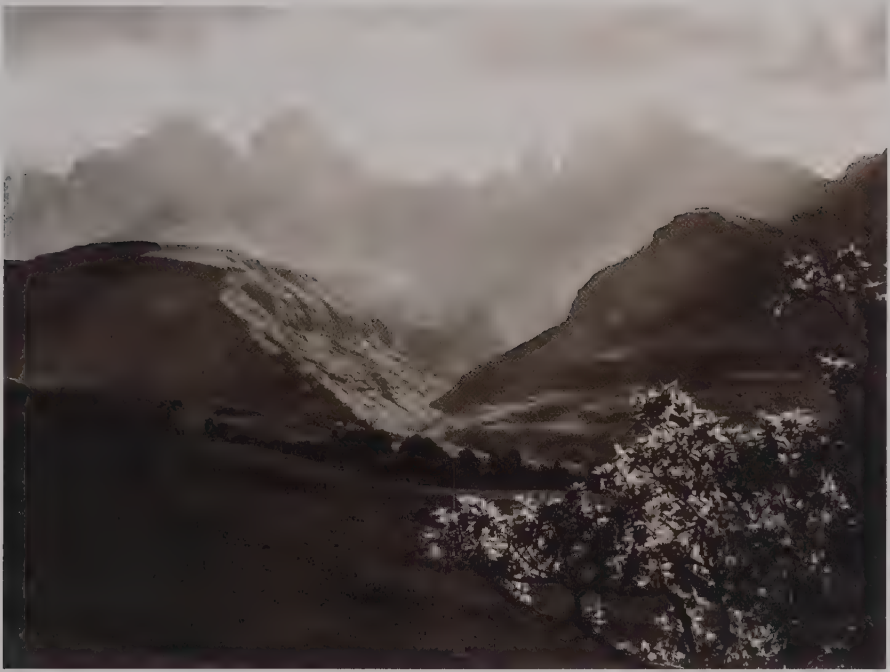
Have baboons a sense of humour? I am quite sure they have. I once set out alone from Champagne Castle Hotel, before it was light, to climb Gatberg. I left so early that I had to forego my usual morning plunge. But halfway up the Little Berg I passed a waterfall with a delightful pool at the bottom. It did not take a moment to strip and plunge in. But I had no towel, and could not dry myself. At that early hour there was sure to be no one else about, so what simpler? With nothing else on but a pair of stout boots and a battered pith helmet, I strode out along the path carrying my clothes. I admit I must have looked a cross between David Livingstone and a strip-tease artist, but I still wasn't quite prepared for what happened. Rounding the corner of the Sphinx, a huge sandstone block, I was confronted by a troop of baboons on the rocks up on my left. It may have been my imagination, but if ever an animal laughed, those baboons did! The row was dreadful. They clung to each other in helpless mirth, and I could have sworn the lady baboons laughed more uproariously than their husbands!

These, then, are some of the creatures of the wild you are likely to encounter in the Drakensberg. Actually we have only been able to touch the surface of a vast subject. There are a multitude of other creatures, too, that will delight the heart of the observant walker, from the tiny black "whirligig" beetles known as Gyrinidae that swim endlessly around on the surface of their rocky pools, to the lammergeier, soaring in proud majesty across the faces of mountain peaks, the lizards, scorpions, beetles, brilliantly coloured dragonflies, gay butterflies, spiders, chameleons, damsel flies, otters, porcupines and the creatures of the night. They are all there, "complete", as the new English Bible puts it, "with all their mighty throng".

And still we have not touched on the birds. There are hundreds of them.

The enthusiastic birdwatcher may find the Drakensberg disappointing, and birdlife may seem less prolific than in the coastal and lowveld areas. This is partly due to the vast scale of the country, where tiny birds often seem lost against the background of the mighty peaks. But they are still to be found, from the great birds of prey circling high in the lonely skies — the lammergeier, the jackal buzzard with his yelping cry, the black eagle, the martial eagle, the lanner falcon, the kites and the kestrels — to the lesser birds of the streams and valleys; the redwinged starling, the Cape robin and the chorister robin, the weaver birds, the warblers, the golden bishop bird, the Cape rock thrush, the woodpeckers, the yellow flycatcher, the crows and the ravens, the kingfishers and the sunbirds, and the hadedah with his lonely cry. It is a subject for a book in itself.

In its peacefulness, its calm serenity, and its balance, this unspoilt part of the wilds is becoming more and more alien to the world that man is so intent on creating with his technological skill — a world of skyscrapers, of foul-smelling factories, and roaring traffic. It is a vanishing idyll, for it is fighting a losing battle, and if we go on as we are doing, it will one day be but a memory. That day, if ever it dawns, will be one of the saddest in man's history, for I believe that this vanishing world has something to say to us, without which we shall be forever immeasurably poorer. The erosion of the soil and the pollution of the atmosphere goes on apace, but these things are of lesser import than the erosion of man's spirit and the pollution of his mind. I believe that if we are ever to regain our sanity, if ever dignity, quietude and integrity are to return to this earth of ours, we will have to realise once again our kinship — our oneness — with the creatures of the wild. Here the earth is rich; the winds blow clean and strong from the mountains; the clouds march endlessly over wind-swept skies; and here life, the true life of nature, goes on its way untroubled. These things spell healing.



Malcolm Pearse

Cathedral Peak

Cathedral Peak Hotel nestles among the trees, snug in its valley and overlooked by the imposing peaks of Inner and Outer Horns, Bell and Cathedral Peak

Karl Beath

The Eagle's View of the Drakensberg

Above: The Dragon's Back spur juts at right-angle to the main escarpment.

Right: From the summit the view is a tumble of valleys and hills of KwaZulu-Natal

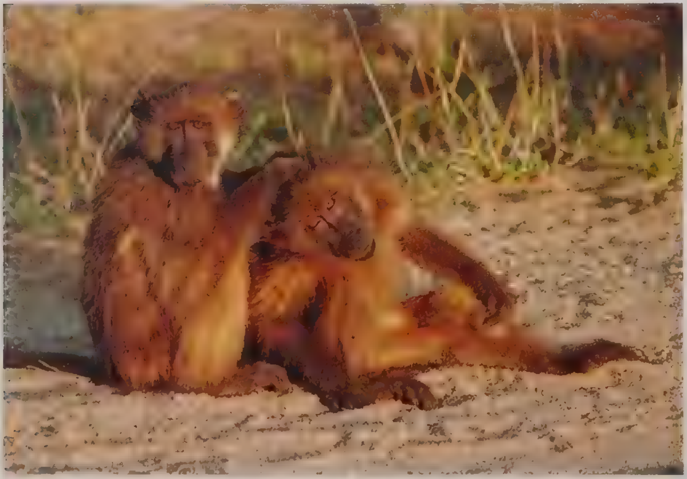
Kat. Beath

CHAPTER 16

THE GEOGRAPHY OF HOPE - 2

I have loved them and suffered with them my whole life.
All that is best in me I have given to them,
and I mean to stand by them to the last.
Axel Munthe, in The Story of San Michele,
speaking of his love for animals

Baboons will go mad with terror at the mere sight of a snake. Even a dead snake will provoke paroxysms of fear. When he raises a stone in search of insects or scorpions, the wise baboon always stands behind the stone, reaches forward, and then lifts the stone towards him. He then peers over the top of the stone. If there is a snake there, he promptly drops the stone and clears off with a piercing scream. So great is their horror of snakes, that if a comrade is caught in the coils of a python, they will make little attempt to rescue him, whereas if it is a leopard, they will leap in and fight to the death.



Chacma baboons

Peter Craig-Cooper

This fear remains, although it is doubtful whether their great enemy, the python, *Python sebae*, exists any longer in the Drakensberg where they used to be common.

Johannes Lombard shot a large python round about 1925 just above his homestead on the farm Solar Cliffs, 3 or 4 km above the junction of the uMlambonje and the uMhlwazini rivers. Another one was killed at about the same time at Buys' Cave, in the Cathkin area. Though non-poisonous, the python can be lethal, and there are records of people having been killed by them. The python kills, not by crushing his victim's bones, as many think, but by suffocation. Every time the victim exhales, the snake wraps his coils tighter and tighter, until breathing is impossible.

But the Drakensberg is still the home of many other snakes, both poisonous and non-poisonous. The attitude of most people to snakes is the same as that of the baboon, unreasoning horror and terror, but actually the snake is a most interesting and highly developed creature, and our fear of them is quite unnecessary. There are some 160 species of snakes in South Africa, of which only about 16 are poisonous. And remember that snakes are far more frightened of you than you are of

African Puffadder (Bitis arietans) John Hone

Courtesy Fitzsimons Snake Park, Durban

them. Most of them will move out of your way if they possibly can. Even if one is bitten, the chances that death will result are very remote, because most snakes are non-poisonous, and in the case of the poisonous snakes, treatment of snakebite is very effective. The number of deaths in South Africa resulting from snakebite is minimal compared to other unnatural causes. Most fatalities occur among rural blacks who rely on traditional remedies, and who, possibly, cannot reach medical help in time.

There are more old-wives' tales told about snakes than about any other wild creature. The puffadder cannot strike backwards, as is commonly believed; the young of the puffadder do not eat their way out of their mother's body; the mamba will not pursue you, especially not at the speed of a galloping horse, though he may be aggressive if cornered; there is no snake that crows like a fowl; and snakes do not suck milk from the teats of a cow. They have no sucking powers, and the fangs are so placed to make this impossible. And whatever you do, don't believe the story that young children can safely play with snakes and come to no harm! Children are no less likely to be bitten than you or I.

The snake has no external ears or eardrums, and cannot hear in the usual sense of the word. When the snake charmer plays his flute, the snake cannot hear a thing. It is the rhythmic swaying of the snake charmer, and not his music, that fascinates the snake. But he does have a rudimentary type of inner ear, which picks up ground vibrations, and transmits them to the brain by way of the auditory nerve. That is why you so seldom see snakes when you are out walking in the veld or on the mountain slopes. The snake "hears" you by means of ground vibrations long before you reach him, and slithers out of your way. If you are out walking in long, thick grass, take a heavy stick with you. Thump the ground ahead as you proceed and you will be practically 100 per cent safe.

Snakes also have very poor eyesight, especially for distant vision. Some can only distinguish between light and darkness. What snakes do detect is movement. If the prey they are hunting remains stock-still for some time, the snake will invariably move off in search of something else. If you are ever confronted by an erect cobra with expanded hood (it is, admittedly, a fearsome sight!), keep your nerve. Don't panic. Don't run. Stay completely still, and the snake will very likely leave you alone.

How does the snake communicate, if he cannot see, hear, or smell properly? He does it by means of his tongue, but not in the way of taste. The snake's tongue has no taste buds, but it is, nonetheless, a marvel of ingenuity. When the snake protrudes his long, forked tongue, the two small tips pick up tiny, airborne particles of whatever the snake is investigating. The tongue is then drawn in, and the tips are inserted into two small cavities, known as Jacobson's Organ, in the front part of the roof of the mouth. The adhering particles are then brought into contact with nerve cells in the cavities, the message is carried to the brain by nerve cells, and there analysed. In this way the snake investigates his environment. Disturb a snake, and watch how he flicks out his tongue. He is investigating where, and what, the danger is.

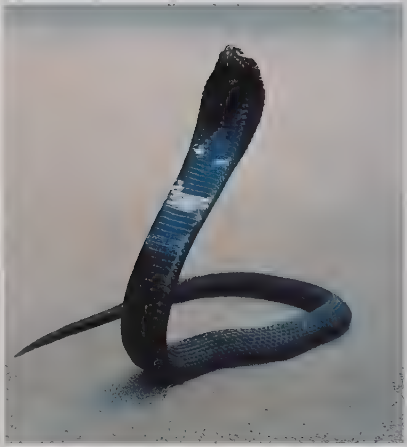
Most snakes feed on frogs, toads, lizards, birds and their eggs, and on a number of the smaller insects and mammals, such as snails, slugs, grasshoppers, rats and mice. Some will even eat other snakes. When I was a very small boy, a mischievous uncle used to tell me the story of two snakes left hanging on a clothes line. Each snake seized the tail of the other, and started swallowing, until each snake had eaten the other and there was nothing left! I used to puzzle my little head for long hours, trying to work out just what had happened to the two snakes!

Broadly speaking, snakes may be divided into two main types, front-fanged and back-fanged. Among the front-fanged Drakensberg snakes are the rinkals and the adders, while the skaapsteker is a typical back-fanged snake. There are no true cobras in the Drakensberg. The rinkals, *Hemachatus haemachatus*, which is also called the ring-necked cobra, or the South African spitting cobra, is not a true cobra, though it does have a hood which it expands. True cobras (the *Naja* genus) have smooth scales, while the rinkals has keeled dorsal scales. Two other differences between the two species are the absence of solid teeth on the maxilla in the case of the rinkals, and the fact that it is ovoviviparous (gives birth to live young), while the cobras are oviparous (egg-laying). The rinkals is found throughout the Drakensberg, up to an altitude of 2 750 m. The Cape cobra, *Naja nivea*, is never found on the Natal side of the Drakensberg, while the black-necked spitting cobra, *Naja negricollis*, is found only in the lowermost foothills, and never at any great altitude.

The rinkals is sometimes known by its Zulu name, *Mfezi*. He is a little smaller than the true cobra — 120 cm to the cobra's 200 cm and over. When approached suddenly in the open he will rear up and face his enemy, with his hood expanded. You will notice that he has white crossbands on his throat. But he is only really aggressive if he is disturbed in the mating season. He seldom actually bites with deliberation, and after taking stock of the intruder he will usually glide away into the grass, head still erect and swaying from side to side.

He does, however, have the ability to eject his poison for a considerable distance, for anything up to 2,25 m. This is his first line of defence. The venom is practically colourless, and of the consistency of glycerine, and he will always aim for the eyes. It comes out first as a single stream, which then breaks into a fine spray. When his escape is cut off he will sham death with remarkable efficiency. His whole body becomes limp, he will turn on his back, and his jaws will gape open. Like the puffadder, the young are brought forth alive, anything from 15 to 60 in number. They are marked like adults, can rear up and expand their hoods, and can bite from birth.

Several reasons have been suggested for why the rinkals spreads his hood in this strange way. It obviously has very strong survival values. The erect position of the snake, especially in long grass, gives it a point of vantage from which to view its enemy. The expanded hood is certainly a protection to the vulnerable neck. The neck is much broader, and thickened, making it more difficult for a small carnivore to obtain a grip with its teeth. A bite merely on the edge of the hood would not be disabling. Whatever the purpose, the sight of a rinkals with hood expanded and sharp, menacing eyes, sailing through the long grass, is certainly a terrifying one, and likely to deter the most vicious enemy.



Rinkals — or South African Spitting Cobra (Hemachatus haemachatus). Although this is a particularly dark specimen, most rinkals found in the Drakensberg will have fairly pronounced orange-brown bands around the body John Hone

Courtesy Fitzsimons Snake Park, Durban

One of the commonest snakes in the Drakensberg is the Berg adder, *Bitis atropos*. It is a small snake, with an average size of only 40 cm, though I once came across a huge specimen — at least 70 cm long — on the slopes of the Injisuthi Buttress. It is uniformly dark grey in colour, with a double series of black subcircular markings down the length of the body, and is often to be found lying in the footpath at dusk. Like most adders they are sluggish, but react violently if annoyed. Unlike other adders, however, their venom is more neurotoxic, with a lesser proportion of haematoxic elements. Although this is a small snake, its venom is potent, but not fatal. It affects mostly the cranial nerves and muscles.

Possibly the most dangerous snake one is likely to meet in the Drakensberg is the puffadder, *Bitis arietans*. As we have said, most snakes are sensitive to ground vibrations, and will get out of your way long before you are upon them, but for some reason this does not seem to apply to the puffadder, and it is all too easy to tramp on him. He is short, thick and sluggish (I once put my hand on one in the darkness of my lighting-plant engine room, and he hardly moved). But tramp on him, and he will strike like lightning. He is often found curled up on the side of a path, or underneath old rubbish. He can reach a length of about 100 cm, but specimens of up to 160 cm have been recorded.

Front-fanged snakes are more dangerous than back-fanged snakes. This is because the fangs are longer and penetrate deeper into the wound, and because the back-fanged snake finds it difficult to get its fangs into a flat surface.

Snake venoms are of two types, the neurotoxins and the haematoxins, the former belonging to the cobra family and the latter to the adders.

Neurotoxins are nerve poisons. They act mainly on the nervous system, and produce paralysis of the heart and lung muscles, the respiratory system being the first to suffer. Immediately after a bite, a strong, burning pain is felt round the area of the bite, and there is a limited degree of swelling and numbness. Paralysis of the tongue and larynx then follows, accompanied by dryness of the throat. The victim finds progressive difficulty in speaking, eyesight becomes blurred, and there is a loss of balance. The heartbeat increases at first, but slows down in the final stages, and violent seizures indicate the approach of death.

Haematoxins are blood poisons. They act principally on the blood system, sometimes as a blood-clotting agent, producing thrombosis, and sometimes as an anticoagulant. This causes a breakdown in the cell structure, and profuse bleeding. In the case of the adder, bloodclotting appears to be the principal action, whereas anticoagulant symptoms appear in the venom of the boomslang.

In the case of a puffadder bite, there is, first of all, the usual intense burning pain, followed by inflammation and swelling of the limb, which becomes extremely painful. Many of the subsequent symptoms are the same as in the case of the neurotoxins — blurred vision, loss of balance, nausea, and difficulty in speaking, owing largely to the drying up of the mouth and throat. Final symptoms are excessive bleeding, blood oozing from the mouth, stomach, bowels and bladder, followed by a short period of unconsciousness, and finally death from suffocation and cardiac failure.

People often ask how long it takes to die from the bite of a poisonous snake. It is impossible to answer this question with any degree of certitude, and indeed death is far from inevitable. It depends on so many factors — your age, the type and size of snake, the locality of the bite, and the degree of immunity of the victim. Generally speaking, haematoxins act more slowly than neurotoxins, but recovery is much slower, and after-effects are much more serious, permanent damage often being inflicted on some organs.

The treatment of snakebite, especially first aid treatment, is a case more of what one must not do rather than what one should do. In the first place, don't panic, and don't run. Any unnecessary movement will only speed up the heart rate, quicken the circulation, and increase the rate at which the body absorbs the poison. Remember, you have plenty of time! Don't take brandy, or any alcoholic drink, as this may speed up the absorption of the poison. Unless you have specific medical training, do not attempt to inject antivenin, as this can have serious adverse effects. Don't under any circumstances cut the flesh around the bite, or in any way interfere with the bite punctures. Not only will it not help, but it will make the wound and the pain very much worse and blood vessels or nerves may be severed. Unless it is known to be a cobra bite, do not use a tourniquet. In the case of a cobra or mamba bite on a limb it may be of some help to put on a light tourniquet, provided it can be done within five minutes of the bite, from just above the bite to the top of the limb. Use a crepe bandage or torn strips of cloth.

Finally, do not try to suck the poison out.

What, then, should one do, if one is out walking with someone who gets bitten? First, apply immediate firm finger pressure above the bite. Calm the patient and reassure him, and keep him as still as possible. Position the patient so the bite area is below heart level. Remember, there is never any cause for desperate panic. His chances of dying are remote, and he must be told this. It is not recommended to kill the snake, as there is a risk that a second person may be bitten. Send two members of the party to summon help and get the victim to a doctor or a hospital as quickly as possible. Keep the limb cool with wet cloths, for this slows down the circulation. If the pain is intense, a painkiller will be helpful. If the bite was from a cobra, artificial respiration may be necessary if signs of asphyxia set in.

The cobra and the rinkals will often eject poison into the eyes. Here the remedy is simply to wash the eyes out with plenty of cold water for at least 10 minutes, making sure that water runs under the eyelids. If water is not available, use any alkaline liquid, such as milk, cold tea, or even urine — a well-established African remedy. It is not advisable to use diluted antivenin, as the victim may be sensitive to it and it could have adverse effects. Further treatment should not be necessary, but if irritation persists, see a doctor.

In all my experience I have heard of only one death from snakebite in the Drakensberg. On Thursday afternoon, 7 April 1955, three men set out to climb Champagne Castle. They were Ian Muller, a brilliant 22-year-old Natal University student; Peter Newman, who was on the architectural staff of the University; and his brother-in-law, John Burrows, also a student, and son of Professor H.R. Burrows of the University. On Sunday evening, 10 April, in heavy mist, at an altitude of 2 000 m, they camped down for the night. Ian went to a small stream, and after crossing it and climbing the far bank, he was bitten in the wrist by what was probably a rinkals. He was immediately put to bed (it was now 6 pm), with warm sleeping-bags around him (by then it was bitterly cold, and rain had set in) and given three injections of anti-snakebite serum. As the night wore on, however, his condition grew steadily worse. By midnight he could talk only with difficulty. His two companions managed to find some wood and lit a small fire, but the dank mist pressed heavily in around them, and Ian's breathing became difficult. In the early hours of the morning he asked for artificial respiration, and this was applied by Peter Newman.

Stick in hand, Ian Muller probes the grass for snakes, while holding his hat in front of his face against the possibility of encountering a spitting cobra

Peter Newman

Ian Muller and John Burrows in iNkosazane Cave the night before the snake bite episode

Peter Newman

As the dawn broke it was raining heavily, and Ian's condition was deteriorating rapidly. It was decided that John Burrows should go for help, and he set off immediately at 6.30 am, heading for Champagne Castle Hotel, 16 km away. With Ian sinking fast, Peter Newman continued applying artificial respiration, but to no avail. At 8 am Ian sank into a deep coma, and died shortly afterwards.

In the meantime John Burrows was speeding down the mountainside. At 11 am he reached the hotel, and raised the alarm. Three rescue parties led by him immediately set off back up the mountain. One of the parties, the Durban Ramblers Club, was holidaying in the area and was the first to reach Peter Newman at 5 pm, but by then, of course, Ian was already dead.

This death from snakebite is disturbing. Why did Ian Muller die? Dr Sherman Ripley, son of "Doc" Ripley and an experienced climber, has made a special study of the treatment of snakebite. I put the question to him, and this was his reply:

"In the absence of specific knowledge of the species of snake which bit Ian, and the lack of detailed post-mortem findings, it is impossible to state with any exactness why he died. From a knowledge of his past medical history and the imperfections of antivenin which was available at the time, the possibility of fatal anaphylactic shock cannot be ruled out. The modern antisera are much improved, and are treated chemically so as to greatly reduce the possibility of their causing any adverse shock reaction. However, even with these modern improvements, one should never resort to the use of antiserum unless one is certain that the person has actually been poisoned."[1]

Snakes have many enemies in addition to man. Large birds of prey such as the martial eagle and the secretary bird find snakes a juicy morsel. I once watched a large eagle with a snake in its talons. I was high on a mountain peak at the time, close on 3 000 m. The eagle was flying round in great circles above me. Every now and then it would release the snake, swoop down and under it, catching it as it fell, and then soar up again. Eventually it flew off, with the snake still firmly clutched and writhing in its talons.

The secretary bird, *Sagittarius serpentarius*, is an expert snake-catcher. When the secretary bird spots his prey, he leaps in in a flash, and the snake has little chance. With wings often outstretched, he uses two powerful weapons with deadly effect, striking swift blows with his feet and ripping the snake to pieces with his beak.

Perhaps the snake's most vicious enemy, however, is the mongoose. There are three species in the Drakensberg, the small grey mongoose, *Galerella pulverulenta*; the white-tailed mongoose, *Ichneumia albicauda*; and the water mongoose, *Atilax paludinosus*. And of a certainty this little chap must surely pack as large a chunk of sheer, naked courage in his little body as any other creature of the wild. He is a restless, alert creature, full of grace and cunning, with a perky little tail usually carried aloft like a triumphant banner, and his attacks on snakes are legendary. He usually selects cobras, mambas or nonvenomous snakes, leaving the adders strictly alone. This is because the mongoose is able to build up a certain immunity against cobra venom, but not against adder venom. When the cobra is devoured, its venom enters the bloodstream and gradually produces immunity. The venom of the adder, however, is destroyed by the mongoose's digestive system, and produces no immunity. He is not, however, completely immune. R.M. Isemonger, an authority on South African snakes, describes an experiment in which a Cape mongoose was injected with 20 mg of Cape cobra venom, a hundred times the dose required to kill a guinea pig of comparable size. The mongoose took 18 hours to die.

When he attacks, the mongoose makes a series of feints from all directions, causing the snake to strike out over and over again. When the snake is tired, and its strength exhausted, the little mongoose leaps in like lightning, seizes the snake behind the head, and sinks his teeth into the soft neck, killing it instantly.

But it is time to say farewell to all these fascinating dwellers in the wilds — yes, fascinating, and always lovely in their innocence. They are all part of Nature's complex pattern, and all possess that mystic gift of life. Albert Schweitzer, with his philosophy of "Reverence for Life" has perhaps reached further into the heart of things than many of us. All life, to him, was to be venerated and protected. Schweitzer could never bring himself to kill any living creature, no matter how seemingly insignificant or even repellent it was. He would even go out of his way to avoid treading on an ant, for to him all life, no matter how humble, was the gift of God. To Tennyson nature was "red in tooth and claw"; to Schweitzer it was sometimes a puzzle, often incomprehensible, but always altogether lovely, and he loved the little scurrying creatures of the forest this side of idolatry. "Up to now," he once said, "we have only included man in our ethics. We must extend them to include the animals who are our kith and kin — our little brothers and sisters."

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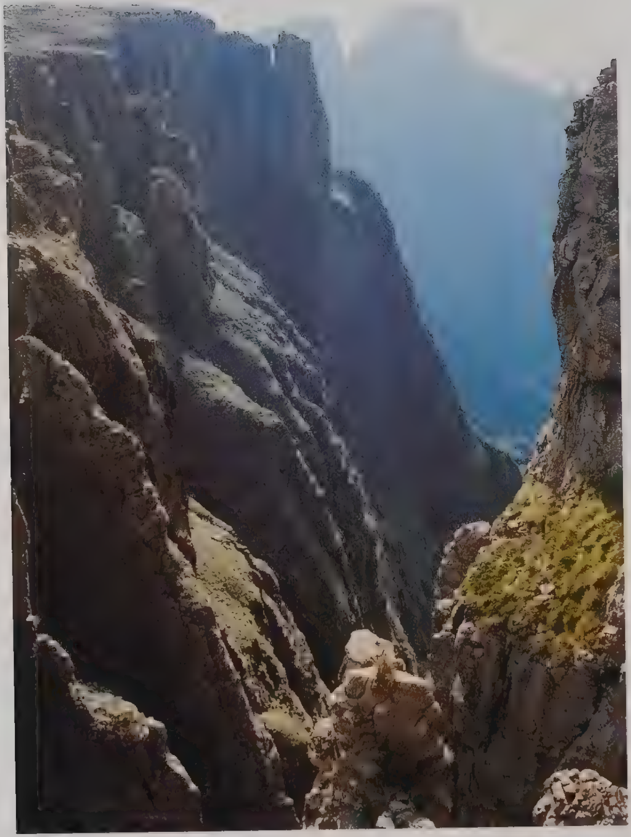
[1] The story of the Ian Muller tragedy is told much more fully in *Dragon's Wrath* by R.O. Pearse and James Byrom (Jonathan Ball) Revised edititon 1997.



Malcolm Pearse

Gullies and Crags

Above: A huge gap in the mountain wall gives a glimpse of the fearsome drop from the summit.

Right: From the Upper Didima in the Central Berg area there is a dramatic skyline of jagged peaks above wisps of cloud and softer, undulating valleys

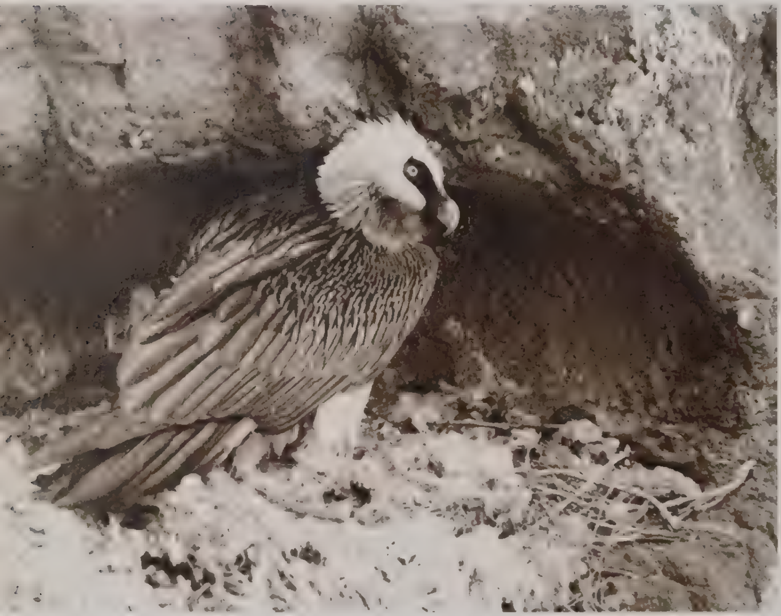
Malcolm Pears.

CHAPTER 17

LAMMERGEIER

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands ...

... He watches from his mountain walls,
And, like a thunderbolt, he falls.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Eagle"



The African lammergeier (Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis) Don Morrison

Our photographing of the African lammergeier[1], the first pictures ever to be taken of this mighty bird, was an event which caused considerable interest among ornithologists, while press reports described it as a "once in a lifetime story". It all started away back in December 1958.

Godfrey Symons, Don Morrison and I had set out on a 10-day trip into the Mnweni area. Godfrey Symons we have already met in the pages of this book. I have often climbed with him: no one could have a finer climbing companion. Don, slighter in build, was the English master on my staff at Estcourt High School, and what a climber! Never have I seen a man with a cooler nerve, a steadier eye, a surer sense of judgement than Don Morrison. On a sheer rock face he was magnificent, and always a joy to watch. And what a tremendous mass of energy he packed into that lithe body of his! I have seen him, at the end of a long day's climb, when the rest of us were stretched out exhausted, high on a mountain crag, filling his lungs with the thin air of the heights, and letting it out in sheer exuberance of spirits, one long joyous call after another flung out to the echoing crags. I remember one evening, when we had only just made our cave in time, with black, menacing thunderclouds rolling up over the peaks, and Don, 20 m above us, roaring defiance at the approaching storm. For many years he was a member of the Natal

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[1] Owing to confusion with the Afrikaans "lammervanger" (a name given to any bird of prey thought to kill small livestock), and the resulting unjustified persecution, the word "lammergeier" has now been officially changed to bearded vulture. In this book I have retained the commonly accepted, and still used, "lammergeier".

Mountain Club Rescue Team, and more than one man probably owes his life to him. I would have trusted him with my own anywhere.

We had climbed up the lovely Mnweni valley, through a land of flowers, ascended the Mnweni Pass, and were spending a few days in uMponjwana Cave, under the shadow of uMponjwana Peak. One golden afternoon we were lying on a sun-warmed slab of rock, with the peaks all about us. Over all was a great stillness. Suddenly a shadow fell over us, and looking up we saw a huge bird with outstretched pinions, gliding in smooth precision, in ever-tightening circles, in the clear mountain air, its plumage a brilliant gold in the afternoon sun. "Lammergeier!" breathed Godfrey, and fascinated, we watched it as it circled lower and lower over us, until we could see its bristly beard and its red, staring eyes. We vowed, then and there, to be the first to photograph this beautiful, mighty bird.

For never before had the African species, *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis*, been photographed, although the European species, *Gypaetus barbatus aureus*, had fallen to the lenses of two photographers, Eric Hosking, the world-famous bird photographer, in southern Spain in 1959, and Bengt Berg in the Himalayas in 1942.

The lammergeier is a mighty bird, with a wing span of 2,5 to 3 m, and is easily recognisable in flight by its tapering wings and its wedge- or diamond-shaped tail, which is unusually long. The white head, which shows up plainly as the bird glides along the ridges of the Drakensberg, is another characteristic. The wings and tail are slate-black with white shaftstreaks, the underparts are slightly off-white, while the throat and neck are a rich orange colour. The ruff and the neck, when raised and reflected in the sunlight, look almost like a golden mane, a magnificent sight. The colour, however, comes from adhesion to the plumage of iron oxide (rust) from the cliffs on which the birds roost and nest. Adults in captivity, which have never come into contact with the iron oxide, have pure white feathers on the neck and underparts. The feet are an ashy colour, legs well-feathered; the beak is black, with a black patch extending around the eyes, and a black bunch of bristles protruding from the base of the beak. This gives the bird its common name of bearded vulture. Very noticeable are the red, staring eyes, which give the bird such a ferocious appearance. We subsequently discovered, however, that this colour varies. The red glare only appears when the bird is alarmed or disturbed, and is caused by a bright red sclerel ring surrounding the eye, which is lowered over the eye in times of danger. Normally the eyes are almost devoid of colour.

The lammergeier chooses a pothole, or shallow cave, high up on a cliff face, where it constructs a large nest some 1,5 to 2 m in diameter. It is usually lined with sheep's wool, goat's hair, and even old sacking and grass ropes picked up near some Basotho kraal.

Often two nests, close together, are used in alternate years by the same pair, and these appear to be occupied for long periods of time. Some authorities believe that as one bird dies the other seeks out a new mate, and so the occupancy of the same nest continues.

In flight the lammergeier is a truly magnificent bird, and it has been known to range over hundreds of kilometres in its search for food[1]. Meinertzhagen, writing in 1930, said "Few birds surpass the lammergeier in powers of flight, and their great prowess as soarers is probably unrivalled. The bird has been observed floating over Mount Everest, the greatest recorded height for any bird."

The diet of the lammergeier is carrion and bones. In fact the bird is a link between the true eagle and the vulture, having the feeding habits of the vulture and the graceful flight of an eagle. (The beak, also, is that of an eagle, while the flat feet are more like those of a vulture.) Farmers have often maintained that the lammergeier takes lambs, and this is one reason for the rarity of the bird, for many farmers have tried to exterminate it. They are, however, quite wrong. From 1959 to date we have made a very careful study of the bird, and never once have we seen it bring in a fresh "kill". It was always some portion of the body of a sheep or an antelope, which the vultures had finished with. Once one of us saw a lammergeier with a dassie in its talons, but we believe this to be an exception.

A lammergeier egg has only once been taken in South Africa, by Graham Hutchinson, at Bushman's Nek, in August 1883. It is now in the Bell-Marley Collection in the Transvaal Museum. Another egg was taken several years ago by permit for the Coryndon Museum in Nairobi by Miles North, at Mount Kenya. As far as we know these are the only two specimens to have been taken in Africa.

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[1] The largest recorded range for a bearded vulture is 4 800 km^2.

Today the bird is on the brink of extinction. At one time it could be found in a broad belt in Europe, stretching from the Pyrenees, the Alps, Sardinia, Austria, Turkey and on into the Himalayas and the mountains of China. Today it is only found rarely in the Pyrenees, Corsica, Sardinia, Arabia and the Himalayas. It disappeared from Bavaria in 1855, and from the Swiss Alps in 1886, the last bird being shot in Graubunden. In the Carpathians the last lammergeier was killed by poisoned bait in 1935. The African species, *Gypaetus barbatus meridionalis*, was once known in the Atlas mountains, Abyssinia, the mountains of Central Africa, and in South Africa all the way from the Drakensberg to the Cape Peninsula. It used to be widely believed that only 20 pairs survived in the Drakensberg and in Lesotho. According to a scientific survey made in 1980-1983, however, it was now estimated that there were about 30 pairs nesting in the Natal Drakensberg, the north-eastern Cape, Free State, QwaQwa, the Transkei and Lesotho. There is one nesting pair at Golden Gate in the Free State. In the rest of Africa it occurs sparingly in the Kenya Highlands, Mount Kenya, Abyssinia and the Atlas Mountains.

Some ornithologists describe the lammergeier as a fierce and very rapacious bird. It certainly looks it. Bury says: "The lammergeier has a very nasty habit of attacking animals in difficulties on a precipice, even a man." Dresser gives a circumstantial account of a small child being carried off by a lammergeier, and Wolf's famous picture depicts a lammergeier attacking a chamois with young. General Sir Ian Hamilton records how he was attacked by a lammergeier when crossing a moving scree, and Sir Alfred Pearse also records being attacked while in difficulties on a slope in Baluchistan. From our own experience and observations we entirely disagree with these records. We would describe the lammergeier as a shy and retiring bird, and have certainly never found any evidence of its attacking human beings. Subsequent to our first sighting of the bird in 1958, we visited, and climbed down to, several nests. Not once were we attacked.

For many months after that memorable afternoon we hunted the bird with our cameras. We were joined by Bill Barnes, then warden at Giant's Castle Game Reserve, a keen ornithologist, mountain climber and wildlife photographer. We explored the whole mountain range, from Giant's Castle to Mont-aux-Sources, camping out in all weathers. We penetrated westwards, down into the valleys of Lesotho, watching the skies with our binoculars. Equipped with compass and map, we worked our way into the remoter fastnesses of the Drakensberg, and when a speck appeared in the sky, we followed it in our glasses until we could be sure that it was not a lammergeier. Only very rarely did we strike gold. When we did, we tried to locate the nest. Actually we managed to find two or three nests, but in each case photography was impossible, for they were located high up on impossible precipices, and when Bill or Don descended from the top by rope, their presence so disturbed the bird that it had already flown off before they reached the nest. We began to despair.

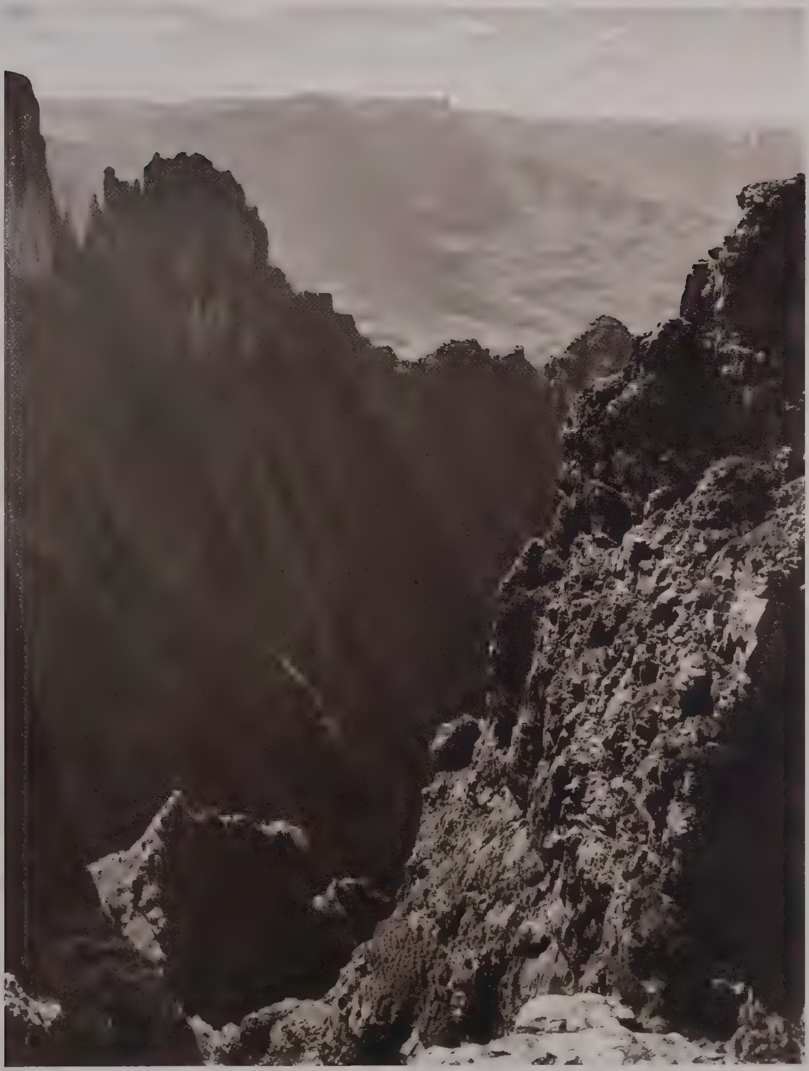
Then one day early in 1961 we had our break. Bill remembered seeing in the faded pages of a game ranger's logbook a reference to a lammergeier's nest in the Mokhotlong area of Lesotho. Although the reference was nearly 60 years old, Bill and Godfrey both reckoned that there was at least a sporting chance of the nest still being there, for, as we have said, the bird is known to nest in the same place for many years. We decided to go and look for it.

Mokhotlong, recognised at the time as one of the remotest outposts in the British Commonwealth, is a tiny mountain village in the heart of Lesotho. At one time it was almost entirely cut off from the outside world, and the only means of access to it was by mountain pony and packhorse over the Sani Pass, a three-day journey. Later an enterprising mountain transport company blazed a trail for four-wheel-drive vehicles over the pass, and later an airstrip was laid down. When we visited it in 1961 it was still a very isolated little spot.

We decided to go in via the Sani Pass, by Landrover, but to hike back over the Lesotho mountains, down the Drakensberg, and so back into Natal.

On Sunday morning, 2 July 1961 we assembled at the Mokhotlong Mountain Transport Company base, just outside Himeville. We were equipped with two Terylene-blue light patrol tents, double sleeping-bags, warm, windproof clothing, climbing gear, and a whole battery of cameras, lenses and film. There was a nip in the early morning air, and the mountains shone clear and blue in the distance.

Sani Pass is a spectacular piece of mountain engineering. It climbs the majestic wall of the Drakensberg from 1 350 m to the lofty Lesotho plateau, 2 875 m in a little over 8 km. So steep and sharp were the hairpin bends that at several places the Landrover had to reverse before it could negotiate them. Old-timers in the bar at Himeville Hotel will tell you with a twinkle in their eyes that in the early days, before the track was improved, even the horses had to bend themselves to get round! At



Malcolm Pears

Vultures Retreat, Central Drakensberg

The deep recesses of Vultures' Retreat are a recorded nesting site of the rare bearded vulture or lammergeier one more than ordinarily sharp corner our Basotho driver, Benjamin, remarked that it was called "Gray's Corner". When we asked him why, he replied, "I guess, Sir, it is because you can only get round by the grace of God!"

It certainly was a bracing and exhilarating climb. With gears screaming, the Landrover battled its way upwards. At some places two of us had to get out and travel on the bonnet to give added weight to the front wheels. Far below, down in the valley, we could see the wrecks of vehicles that had not been able to make it. The air became noticeably thinner and more bracing, and behind us the vast panorama of the plains of Natal opened out in a vista of limitless hills and valleys.

At last we levelled out at the top. A brief rest to stretch our cramped limbs and to admire the view, and then off we set again, bucketing over a wide-stretching plain, and then climbing up to the summit of the Black Mountains, 3 350 m high. Here we again called a halt to admire the magnificent view — range upon range of majestic mountains and wine-dark valleys, over which marched long cohorts of cumulus cloud, white and glistening. We could just see Thabana Ntlenyana, 3 482 m, the highest point in Southern Africa. The sun shone crisply, and it was bitterly cold. Snow lay on the sides of the mountains. Then on again, down the spectacular Masenkeng Pass into the valley of the Sehonghong River, "the river which twists and turns".

Basotho riders in their bright, colourful blankets came riding past on their sturdy mountain ponies. We also began to pass trains of pack-mules on their long journey from the highlands of Lesotho down into the plains of Natal, carrying bales of wool which they would barter for wheat and grain for the return journey. After a quick picnic lunch beside a mountain stream, where rainbow trout swam lazily in the dark pool at our feet, we skirted the gorges of the Orange River on our left, and at 4.30 pm, tired and smothered in dust, we entered Mokhotlong under a red sunset.

We drove first of all to the residence of Douglas Stenton, the District Commissioner, where we reported our arrival and were introduced to his charming wife and little boy. Though we were complete strangers to him, no one could have given us a warmer or more kindly welcome. After inviting us to hot baths and dinner that evening, Stenton took us over to the Government Rest House, which was to be our base during the next few days while we were searching for the lammergeier's nest. There followed a delightful evening with the Stentons, during which Douglas, an enthusiastic radio ham, called up Dennis Milligan in Estcourt, a mutual friend and also a radio ham, and we were able to keep in touch with our families.

Next morning we all gathered in the District Commissioner's office, and Stenton listened to a brief account of why we had come to Mokhotlong.

"Well," he said at length, "it's going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack, you know. The Mokhotlong area covers more than 2 000 square miles, and the nest could be anywhere. Still, well see what we can do."

He called for his orderly, and asked him to send for four of his senior police officers, who knew every corner of their 5 000 km^2 territory.

"Mohlala," said the D.C. to the first man, "I want you to tell these gentlemen if you know of any place where the great birds which you call Ntsu fly around."

No, he did not know, nor did the next two, and our hearts sank. But the fourth man, his face lighting up, said, "Yes, Morena, I know of such a place."

"Are you sure?" asked the D.C. "How do you know this is the great bird these gentlemen want, and not just a vulture, a *Lenong*?"

"*Morena*," replied the man, "we always call this great bird the *Ntsu*, and these birds, they drop the bones of animals from a great height, and break them on the rocks, and then eat the marrow."

At these words a gleam of excitement flashed into Godfrey's eyes, and Bill suddenly stared at the man, for here was the old legend of the lammergeier, half as old as time, but never scientifically established.

"Are you sure of this?" asked Godfrey.

"I am sure, *Morena*," replied the man.

"And where do these birds build their nests?"

"*Morena*, they build their nests high in the face of a cliff."

"And of what do they make them?" asked Bill.

"Wool, *Morena*," replied the man, "and sticks and pieces of hide, but chiefly wool."

"This is it, chaps," said Bill excitedly, and then turning to the police officer, "and can you take us to this place?"

"I can, *Morena*," the policeman said.

"Come on," said the D.C., almost as excited as we were, "into the Landrover with all your kit. We'll leave right now."

We piled in with all our gear, and with Douglas Stenton at the wheel

The cliff with lammergeier nest. The outskirts of Mokhotlong is in the background Bill Barnes collection

and the police officer behind, we set off with a roar, down into the valley of the river, across its clear waters, and up the other side, heading roughly in the direction of the Orange River.

It was wild and lovely country through which we travelled, a country of lofty hills, steep inclines and dark-shaded valleys. It did not take us long to reach the spot as indicated by the police officer, a few kilometres above the junction of the Orange and the Mokhotlong. Anxiously we scanned the cliffs, but to the practised eyes of Godfrey and Bill there wasn't the vestige of a sign of a lammergeier's nest. However, three quarters of a kilometre away were some even larger cliffs, and leaving the Landrover behind, we headed for these on foot.

Ten minutes later Godfrey suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. "What's that?" he said, pointing to the cliff face half a kilometre away, "A little bit off to the right!" "That" was a small cavity in the rock face, 90 m from the top and about the same distance from the bottom, and in the cavity was an orange dot. Thirty seconds later the binoculars confirmed the fact that the orange dot was indeed a lammergeier, and that our search was almost certainly at an end.

At the foot of the precipice we made a swift reconnaissance of the cliff face with our glasses. Roughly level with the nest and about 25 m away was a small ledge on the left-hand side of a deep V-shaped gash in the face of the mountain, and the nest faced directly on to the ledge, across this gap. With growing excitement we realised that if only we could reach this ledge we could aim our cameras directly on to the nest, across the gap, and so obtain the pictures we wanted. We decided to try and climb the 90 m of rock face which lay below the ledge, and the job of route-finding was over to Bill and Don, the two rock experts.

Equipped with pitons, snap-links and 60 m of nylon rope, the two men set off, while Douglas Stenton, Godfrey and I watched from down below. At first they made good progress, but halfway up the attempt nearly ended in disaster on the slippery rocks of a half-dried waterfall, and the men had to return.

We next considered the feasibility of climbing to the top of the precipice via a steep slope at the back, and then climbing down to the ledge. A wide detour and a stiff scramble brought us out on to a projecting spur of the cliff, from which both the nest and the grass ledge could be seen, 120 m away, and 90 m below us. Here we took our first pictures of the orange-breasted bird with the 400 mm lens.

But the range was too great for good photography. It was essential to reach that grass ledge if our efforts were to be crowned with success. We examined the rock face again with our binoculars, and soon Don

Don Morrison, Reg Pearse, Bill Barnes and Godfrey Symons

Bill Barnes Collection

announced that a 70 m abseil down the cliff was feasible at a point midway between our projecting spur and the nest. From the foot of the abseil a steep slope led down to the grass slope which would present no real difficulty.

Bill and Don immediately set about the preliminaries. Pitons were driven into cracks in the rock above the abseil point, snap-links attached, the rope threaded through and firmly secured. Don went over first, watched with awe by a couple of Basotho herdboys far below, and he was followed by Bill.

Soon they were sitting on the ledge, in a concealed recess, out of sight of the bird, but peering round the corner they could see a hole in the rock face and the great bird sitting on the nest. They watched, fascinated. Few people in the world, if any, had ever been as close to the bird as this. They could clearly see the bristly beard under the beak, and the great red staring eye which gave the bird such a fearsome appearance. When she flew off the nest as she did when she was disturbed they could see a single egg lying on the sticks and wool. It was about three times the size of a hen's egg and creamy white in colour, with patches of light purplish-grey and brownish-yellow. The binoculars revealed fine, dark-brown dots here and there.

The ledge on which they were sitting was less than a metre wide, and below was a sheer drop of 90 m, but the men were soon hard at work with their cameras, getting a second batch of priceless pictures.

The return of the two men presented no small problem, for they had insufficient rope to abseil the 90 m to the foot of the cliff. They decided to try and climb the vertical cliff face between the abseil point and the nest, where the rock was a little more broken. Godfrey and I anchored ourselves firmly to the rock at the top of the proposed climb, from where we let the rope down and belayed Don. He made it, and then he brought Bill up. Bill is a man of few but expressive words. As he flopped down beside us and wiped his brow, he said "Hell, never again!"

So ended the first day, with success beyond our wildest dreams. But this was only the beginning. The light had been bad, time had been short, and we felt we could do better. We decided that on the following day all four of us would attempt a descent to the ledge via the broken rock face which Bill and Don has ascended, and spend the day there, using our cameras at our leisure.

Neither Godfrey nor I had had very much experience on the rope, but we were quite willing to give it a go. Once again the pitons were driven in and the snap-links attached. This time we brought up a reserve supply of rope. Godfrey went first, belayed by Don, his descent punctuated by some of the most lurid language I am sure those ancient crags had ever heard! Then I roped up and went over. I cannot say I enjoyed it, but at the bottom Godfrey was waiting for me. As I unroped he thrust a bottle of brandy into my hands, and said laconically, "Thought you'd need it, old man." But I noticed the bottle was already two-thirds empty, and that his hands still shook! Then came Bill, and finally Don, cool and steady as always, belayed by the three of us already down below, with the double rope running freely through a snap-link at the top of the climb.

We were soon hard at work. We had with us four cameras, two 400 mm telephoto lenses, one 240 mm lens, and one 135 mm lens, a battery-operated solenoid device for controlling the shutter of a camera at a distance, a good supply of both black and white and colour film, and, of course, our lunch packs.

Don Morrison abseils to the ledge Bill Barnes Collection

It was not easy. There was only room for one man at a time on the ledge, and the position was cramped. Our hands were freezing. One camera jammed and two rolls of film snapped, possibly due to the extreme cold. Every time we left the recess and turned the corner to get a better shot the bird would fly off the nest.

Then at last our luck turned. The late afternoon sun came out strongly. Not only did this give us better light, but the rays of the level sun, shining directly into the eyes of the bird, seemed to blind it to our presence, and she did not fly off when we turned the corner. Tense with excitement, we spoke in whispers, the only other sound being the sigh of the wind and the steady clicking of our cameras.

Then came the climb back. By this time the weather had again deteriorated. Sleet came drifting down the valleys, and a covering of snow began to appear on the higher peaks. It was bitterly cold, and each man carried a heavy pack. In order to get the rest of the team up with the maximum of safety, Don went up first, belayed by the men below. I went up next belayed by Don, followed by Godfrey and Bill. It proved to be one of the stiffest climbs I had ever made. Whipped by driving rain, in a freezing gale, I nearly petered out. Halfway up I found myself under an overhang, with my fingers frozen and empty space below. I called up to Don that I didn't think I could make it. His voice came floating down from far above: "Climb, you beggar, climb!" But the word wasn't beggar! That did it. "What right has he to talk to his Headmaster like that," I thought savagely, and eventually I made it. When Godfrey reached the final slab, his shins raw and his hands bleeding, he hung there and gasped out "Rope climbing! Not on your ruddy life!"

But at the top to welcome us were our good friends the Stentons, with the Landrover, a thermos of hot tea, and, wonder of wonders, a steaming ham-and-egg pie! They had watched the weather worsening, and, like the good friends that they were, had hurried out to our rescue. It was then that Godfrey, waving a huge piece of pie in one hand, insisted on knighting the D.C. and his wife — "Lord and Lady Lammergeier Stenton!" Then, with the sleet hammering on the windows and a rising gale outside, we relaxed, warm and safe in the shelter of the Landrover, content with the knowledge of a dream fulfilled.

That night, sitting round our camp fire after the rain had passed, we took stock of our results. We had succeeded far beyond anything we had ever dared to hope for, but the job was still not complete. A properly constructed hide on the grass ledge would simplify enormously the job of photographing the bird, and though the two 400 mm lenses had done us well, we wanted to return with a 600 mm lens. We also wanted to get pictures of the chick when the egg hatched. It was also necessary to work out a better method of climbing down to, and back from, the nest. The rope climb was far too dangerous and time-consuming for regular use. With all these ideas in our minds we snuggled down into our sleeping-bags, while the light of our camp fire slowly flickered out.

Godfrey Symons, Bill Barnes and Reg Pearse P. Culverwell

Next day we set out on our return. In many ways our journey home across one of the most mountainous regions in the world was perhaps the highlight of the whole trip. Our route lay up the valley of the Mokhotlong River, which twisted and turned through the mountain mazes. It was a country of lofty peaks and clear mountain streams. Douglas Stenton had very kindly provided us with a packhorse and driver, but even so our packs were heavy, for in addition to all our photographic and climbing equipment, we had to carry extra warm clothing, the two Terylene tents, and of course all our food for four days, and our bedding.

We did not hurry unduly. There were frequent halts to consult maps and compass, for we were in unknown country, and many a stop for morning and afternoon tea brewed by the wayside.

Malcolm Pearse

Cathedral Peak

Great peaks raise their heads above the clouds . Cathedral Peak with the Bell (left) with Mnweni Needles and then uMponjwana almost hidden from view

It was 4 pm on the first day before we arrived at the junction of the Mokhotlong and the Sanqebethu Rivers, where we proposed to camp for the night. The temperature was well below freezing by the time darkness fell, and we were glad to snuggle down into our warm sleeping-bags.

Next day we left the Mokhotlong River, and turned left up the Sanqebethu. Our route lay through pleasant valleys and steep gorges, climbing higher and higher. At first we found the valleys fairly well populated, and we passed a number of Basotho kraals perched on the valley sides. Whenever today I see the blue-grey smoke, and smell the tang, of a cattle-dung fire, it brings back to me those four carefree days and the lonely Basotho kraals.

On the second night we camped in bitter weather on the banks of the Sanqebethu, at a temperature far below freezing point. That night our medical supplies, packed in a rucksack and kept inside our tent all night, froze solid, and next morning our eggs were also frozen as hard as a rock. We had to break through the ice of the frozen Sanqebethu to get our water.

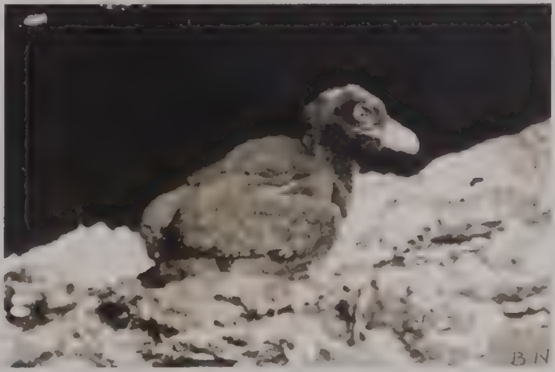
And now the country became bleaker and more mountainous as we approached the 3 000 m level. Kraals were few and far between, until at last there were none, and we were alone in the silence of the great peaks.

At length, at midday on the fourth day, we came out at the head of the Langalibalele Pass, with all Natal below us, and our journey was nearly over. To right and left stretched the massive ramparts of the Drakensberg Mountains, blue, remote, cloud-hung, with the Injisuthi on our left and Giant's Castle, towering up into the clouds, on our right. Eighteen hundred metres below, just beyond the foot of the pass, gleamed the white walls of Bill's house. With the mists gathering behind us, we made a quick descent of the pass, and by 5 pm we were sitting round a cheery log fire in Bill's lounge, with generous supplies of beer beside us.

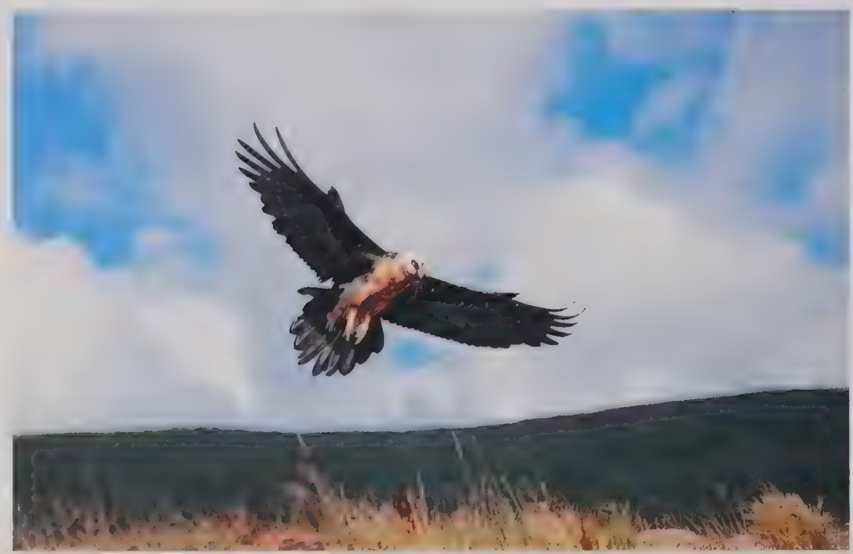
We now lost no time in preparing for our new arrangements. The problem of transport was happily solved through the generous offer of Eddie and George Brokensha, two Estcourt businessmen, to fly us and our equipment in their light Cessna plane. A portable hide was made out of hessian, the Natal Parks Board generously came to our assistance with the loan of a 600 mm lens, and most important of all, Bill and his game rangers made a light 60 m chain ladder for the descent of the cliff face.

Bill Barnes descending the ladder which was affixed to the rock face Don Morrison

A week later all was ready. Owing to the weight of the chain ladder it was possible to take only two passengers in the plane, and the choice naturally fell on the two rock climbers, Bill and Don. They took off from the Estcourt aerodrome at first light on 16 July. Half an hour later they were soaring over the mighty ramparts of the Drakensberg, and by 8 am they were having breakfast with the Stentons. The gear was stowed in the Landrover, taken out to the site, and by late afternoon the chain ladder was in position, the hide erected, and the men back in Mokhotlong.



The lammergeier chick, 3-4 weeks old P R Barn



Lammergeier in flight Nigel Dennis

Before they left for home, arrangements were made for the Stentons to keep a watch on the nest for the hatching of the egg.

On 14 August Mrs Stenton reported to us by radio that the egg had hatched the previous day, and a month later arrangements were made for a final visit to the site, for it was time to photograph the fledgling. On 17 September Godfrey Symons, his wife Norah, and Bill flew in with Eddie Brokensha, and secured a final set of photographs with the 600 mm lens. Among them was one of the chick, the second in the world ever to be taken of a lammergeier fledgling. (Bengt Berg had photographed the chick of *Gyyaetus barbatus aureus* in the Himalayas in 1942.)

And it was on this trip that Bill and Godfrey were able to establish the truth of the old legend of the lammergeier dropping bones on to a rock slab, a legend which has come down to us from ancient Greek times, but which has often been scoffed at by ornithologists. Pliny was the first to describe it, and it was he who accused the lammergeier of having caused the death of the poet Aeschylus by dropping a tortoise on the bald head of that unfortunate gentleman! The bird is mentioned twice in the Bible (Lev. xi.13 and Deut. xiv.12) where the name *ossifrage* is used, a word which means bone-breaker. But Meinertzhagen states: "I have lived with lammergeiers in the Himalayas, and at Quetta, for years, and have seen them in Crete, the Pyrenees, on Mount Kenya, and in Arabia, but have not yet witnessed this bone-dropping. It is certainly not a regular habit."

Bill and Godfrey actually watched it happening. The bird would come swooping in, like a great bomber, a piece of bone in its claws. When it reached the rock (it always used the same one) it would release the bone, which would splinter on the rock below. Then the bird would swoop in and collect the fragments, always hotly pursued, though at a safe distance, by the ever-present crows.

This rounded off, and completed, our enterprise. But now, before the final curtain rang down, disaster nearly struck. They were late in leaving Mokhotlong. For the last time the gum trees, the tin roofs and the dusty roads of the little outpost appeared below the wingtips of the plane as they took off from the airstrip. The sky was already darkening, and the tiny plane, a speck in the sky, flew on into the gathering dusk.

Bill often told me what happened.

We flew straight into the Bafali valley. After a few minutes it became obvious to all that the little plane was labouring under the heavy load. Godfrey's large bulk occupied the front seat with Eddie Brokensha, the pilot, while Norah and I sat behind, smothered in a conglomeration of photographic equipment. The pilot was hugging the cliffs in the hope of making use of any air currents there might be. Around the corner the valley broadened slightly, and Eddie did a tight circle in an effort to gain more height, as the ground ahead was rising steeply. South Africa's second highest mountain, the snow-capped Makheke, was just to our right, and the high Injisuthi ridge, over which we had to fly, came up rapidly in stark relief.

Moments later the circling act was repeated. And now the slopes of Injisuthi, sinister and bleak, were right below. I remember looking at the tufts of grass which had made crab-like holes in the snow-drifts as they waved around in the wind. We could almost touch them with our hands. Then we were over, with only feet to spare.

Any hope of relaxing there might have been, however, was soon dispelled when we saw what lay before us — solid white cloud as far as the eye could see. Undaunted we flew on, as the 5 pm weather report from Estcourt, given us by radio ham Dennis Milligan, had been favourable. The minutes fled by, but no break in the sea of cloud could be detected. Around us the dark immensity of night was closing in rapidly. To add to our troubles, the fuel gauge became a matter of concern: 45 minutes flying time left. Durban might have been a possibility, but it was probably shrouded in cloud. An overshoot would mean a watery grave. Bloemfontein, across mountainous country, was just beyond reach. Mokhotlong, from where we had taken off, was the only possible landing strip, ringed by mountains, with no lights, a difficult enough landing strip in daylight, but at night a death-trap. The aircraft was not equipped with radio, and we were all conscious of a vague sense of uneasiness.

The tension was mounting. I was even too frightened to smoke, let alone utter a word. Suddenly Eddie broke the silence. "One more minute, and we must return to Mokhotlong," he said. Looking back, all we could see were the tips of Giant's Castle, Cleft Peak and Mont-aux-Sources. Below us the same white sea of cloud.

Suddenly, far below, a single hole appeared, and three distant pinpoints of light. Without a moment's hesitation Eddie put the nose of the plane down. Down, down into the blackness we went, the lights getting brighter and brighter. Then, at last, away to our right, we spied the glow of a town — Ladysmith, perhaps? But no — the familiar lights of Estcourt. A perfect landing brought us safely back to earth, and to the end of the trip, thanks to the cool courage, the perfect judgement, and the expert handling of the plane by a great pilot. A post-mortem revealed that only six short sentences had been spoken in the plane from take-off to breaking through the cloud.

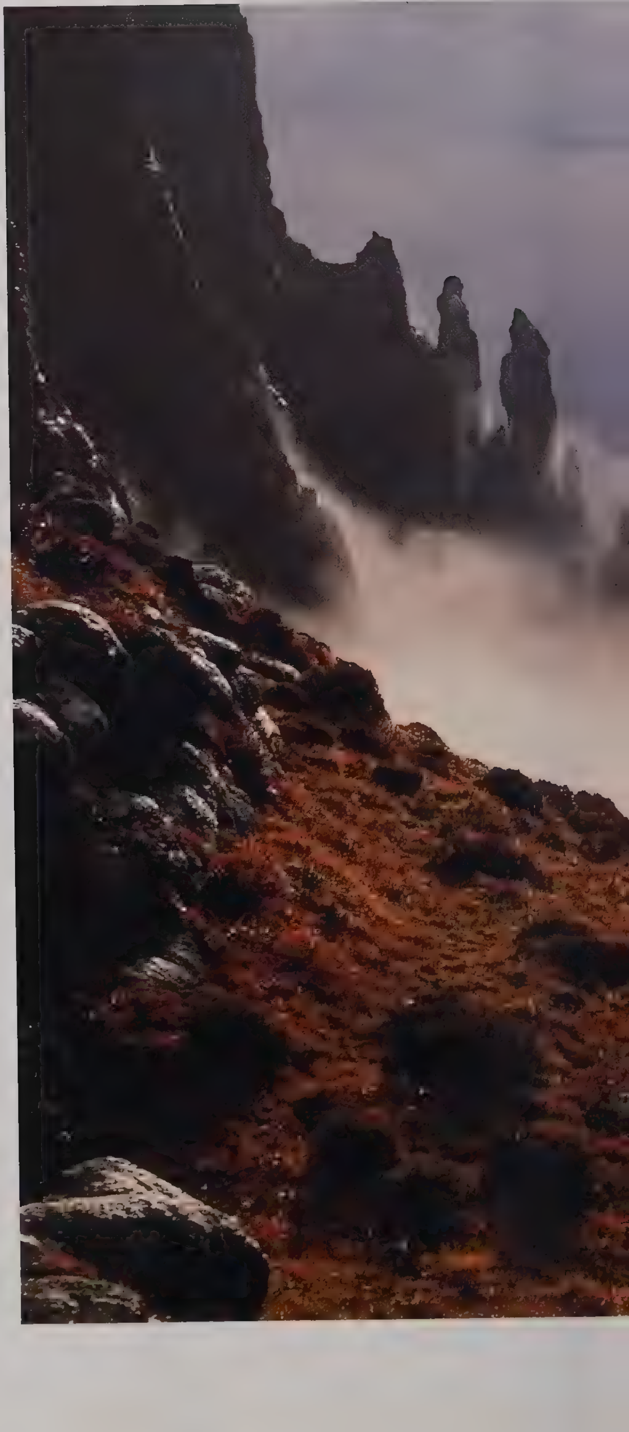
There is not much more to be said. If it did nothing else, our series of pictures did at least something to draw the interest of the people of Natal and of South Africa to this beautiful bird, and to start a movement for its greater protection. The Pan African Ornithological Conference, held in Pietermaritzburg towards the end of 1961, made special reference to the lammergeier, and to the fact that it would become extinct in South Africa, like the dodo, unless special steps were taken to protect it. Godfrey Symons was accorded the honour of addressing the conference. In 1962 the Transvaal Provincial Administration proclaimed the lammergeier a protected bird, a step which had already been taken by Natal. In 1964 the Natal Branch of the Wildlife Protection and Conservation Society of South Africa brought out a well-produced pamphlet, illustrated with our photographs, and designed mainly for distribution among the farming community of Natal. This pamphlet made a strong plea for a greater understanding of the bird, and for greater efforts to be made for its protection. It pointed out that its slow rate of reproduction (only one egg each year), and the fact that many farmers were trying to poison the bird in the mistaken belief that it preyed on their lambs, was resulting in the gradual extinction of the bird. It suggested that if traps were set or poison laid for jackals, such carcasses should be covered from view, and that the traps and poison-bait be removed before daylight, as the lammergeier, owing to its lack of a sense of smell, was very easily trapped or poisoned.

In September 1967 the Gilbert Handley Memorial Hide was opened on the slopes of Giant's Castle, in an effort to create an even greater interest in the bird, and to ensure that it could obtain adequate supplies of food. Owing to the steadily decreasing numbers of wild animals today, and the subsequent lack of carcasses in the veld, the birds' natural food supply has decreased alarmingly. Offal and bones are scattered around the hide by Natal Parks Board officials. Not only is this a boon to wildlife photographers, but it provides an appreciable augmentation to the birds' food supply. This was a joint effort by the Natal Parks Board and the Wildlife Protection and Conservation Society of South Africa.

Late in 1979 the Natal Parks Board, working in close association with the Wildlife Society, decided to embark on a research project to find out more about this strange and mighty bird. The project was funded by the University of Natal, the Natal Parks Board Research Board, the South African Nature Foundation, the CSIR, and the Natal branch of the Wildlife Society of Southern Africa. Research commenced in February 1980 and fieldwork was completed by March 1983. Today we know much more about the bird, its distribution and its breeding habits.

These efforts were rewarded with success, and Bill Barnes, former Regional Warden of the Drakensberg, was of the opinion that the number of lammergeiers in the Drakensberg was slowly increasing. Even so, it is going to be a long hard battle, and the bird is still on the danger list.

And so, with this mighty bird photographed at last, we leave the lammergeier, Lord of the African Skies, to his mountain home and to the freedom of the great peaks and the lonely skies. Long may he survive!



"The top is grand beyond all telling, but it is an austere grandeur." Sharp spires emerge from the swirling mist to mark the summit of the uMbundini Pass

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 18

THE WILD ONES

Prim little scholars are the flowers of her garden,
Trained to stand in rows, and asking if they please.
I might love them well, but for loving more the wild ones —
O my wild ones — they tell me more than these.
George Meredith, "Love in the Valley"

When Dr Otto du Plessis, Administrator of the Cape, opened the Caledon Wild Flower Show in September 1958, he said that the Caledon district had more wild flowers to the square mile than any other spot on earth. In the opinion of Professor H.B. Rycroft, former director of Kirstenbosch, South Africa as a whole has possibly the richest flora of any country in the world.

The Republic certainly is unique for the richness and variety of its wild flowers. Britain possesses about 1 750 flower species. South Africa has no fewer than 24 000. Of course, pride of place must go to the Cape. Ever since those early days when storm-tossed sailors put ashore under the grey crags of Table Mountain, and took back with them seeds and bulbs of the strange new flowers they found there, the Cape has been world-famous for the range and the beauty of its wild flowers.

But I believe the Drakensberg comes a close second. With Lesotho, it is the only place in southern Africa where alpine flowers are found. Dr D.J.B. Killick, in 1950 and 1951, made a detailed study of just one small area of the Drakensberg, the Cathedral Peak area, and found no fewer than 1000 species there, 30 of which were new to science. Botanically speaking, parts of the Drakensberg are still unknown. Starting with Dr Killick's *Account of the Plant Ecology of the Cathedral Peak Area*, W.R. Trauseld's *Wild Flowers of the Drakensberg*, and Elsa Pooley's *Mountain Flowers: A Field Guide to the Flora of the Drakensberg and Lesotho*, there are also a few monographs in scientific journals, such as J.W. Bews's *Plant Ecology of the Drakensberg Range* (1917); E.E. Galpin's *Contribution to the Knowledge of the Flora of the Drakensberg* (1909); E.A. Schelpe's *Plant Ecology of the Cathedral Peak Area* (1946) and an excellent book, *The Botany of the Southern Natal Drakensberg* (1987) by O.M. Hilliard and B.L. Burtt[1].

John William Bews

There must be few areas in the world which offer a wider range of flowering plants, from lowly ground orchids to the prehistoric cycad, from the tiny *Scillas* and *Ledebourias* to the proud and stately *Kniphofias*, from the drought-resistant succulents such as *Kalanchoe thyrsiflora* to bog and water-loving plants such as *Aponogeton junceus*. Habitats range from the warm, sunlit valleys of the Little Berg to the cold summit areas at over 3 000 m, where snow can lie for months on end; from hot, north-facing slopes, where the soil rapidly dries out, to the cooler, moister south-facing slopes, where you find the rich, deep *Podocarpus* (yellowwood) forests; while rainfall can vary between 850 mm and 2 025 mm and over per annum.

In 1978 I published my own book on Drakensberg wild flowers, *Mountain Splendour*, published by Howard Timmins.

Malcolm Pearse

Bright yellow Moraeas at the head of Rockeries Pass smile a welcome to weary climbers

Admittedly you will not find here, except in rare instances, those great splashes of colour that make the mountains of the Cape, or the great plains of Namaqualand, blaze so magnificently. Here you will often have to search diligently for these lovely gems, and at certain seasons of the year, as in winter, there will be little to delight the eye. But in spring the slopes of the Little Berg and their sun-filled valleys can be a joy beyond telling. Here you will find the soft foam of the *Buddleias*, the clear azure of the *Scillas*, and the scarlet flame of the bottlebrushes (*Greyia sutherlandii*), with their brilliant, water-green leaves. And in the wet grass beside a mountain stream you will find the dainty blue *Lobelia*, and the pure white of the *Schizochilus*. In summer the summit is a riot of colour, rich yellow *Moraeas*, rose-red *Dieramas*, pink *Nerines*, and the red-hot pokers standing proudly on the edges of their rock-girt pools. In autumn you have the deep yellow of the *Inulantheras*, and the even brighter yellow of the canary creeper (*Senecio tamoides*) festooning the trees of the forests.

Never are flowers lovelier than in their natural setting. To experience the real beauty of wild flowers one should see them, not in a formal garden, but on the mountain slopes, opening their dew-drenched petals to the sun beside a tumbling stream, gracing a moss-covered rock in the rich gloom of the forest, dotting the green hillsides of the Little Berg after a night of rain, or clinging to the grey summit rocks of some mountain peak. To come suddenly on a patch of dwarf *Dieramas* shining in the wind at the head of a mountain pass after a stiff climb, or a group of sky-blue *Scillas* and snowy *Anemones* in a hollow of the hills, is to experience a joy that makes the heart ache with its intensity.

And it is not difficult to get to know their names. Of the many delights of wandering in the Drakensberg, the recognition of the wild flowers is perhaps the most rewarding. Very little botanical knowledge, if any, is required, and it is surprising how quickly one learns the names of the flowers, and with what joy one greets their discovery.

The *Scillas* you will easily recognise. *Scilla natalensis*, the commonest of them, blooms round about October. It is rather like a hyacinth, pale blue in colour, up to 1m tall in flower, (about 35 cm high), with a large bulb, half of which protrudes out of the ground. It is usually found growing on the steep sides of small gullies and ravines. The flower head consists of a spike of small, misty-blue flowers, with the youngest at the top of the spike. It has two Zulu names, *uBulika* and *inGuduza*.

The Zulus use the plant for a variety of medicinal purposes. The leaves of the plant are dried and ground up and mixed with pumice stone, and given to a child who is late in learning to walk. In addition to their purgative properties, they are used in the treatment of cattle for lung sickness, and the women even cut them up and use them as soap in the washing of clothes. The well-known expectorant, Syrup of Squills, is made from a species of *Scilla*. In addition to *S. natalensis* there are several dwarf varieties, one of them, *S. dracomontana*, being a particularly dainty little flower about 6 cm high with darker blue petals.

Flowering at the same time, and often associated with the *Scilla* species, is a creamy-white flower with a yellow centre known as *Anemone fanninii*. It is larger than *Scilla natalensis*, growing to a height of 60 to 70 cm. The flowers are about 8 cm in diameter. It was named after George Fox Fannin of the Dargle, one of Natal's earliest plant collectors. The Zulus make an infusion from the roots, which is black in colour, and this is used as a purgative and also as a cure for gall-sickness. Their name for it is *uManzamnyama*, which means black water.

Another flower which is quite easy to recognise is the *Dierama*. The flowers are bell-shaped and are borne on slender, arching, grass-like stems, with a series of drooping spikes near the tip, each bearing several pendulous flowers. These range in colour from pure white, through mauves and pinks, to purple, magenta and crimson. Most *Dieramas* are tall plants, growing in grasslands, usually singly, to a height of 100 cm. They have a number of common names, among them wand flower, fairy bell, grassy bell, grasklokkie, wedding bell and flowering grass. For many years they have been popular in the gardens of Europe. On one occasion South Africa sent seed over to Ireland as a gift. It was planted in County Down, where, if you remember, "the Mountains of Mourne sweep down to the sea", and here the plants flourished. *Dieramas* like a rich, moist soil, and apparently they found just what they wanted in the soils of Ireland. Spikes of up to 280 cm have been measured there.

D. robustum[1] is one of the commonest and tallest of the Drakensberg

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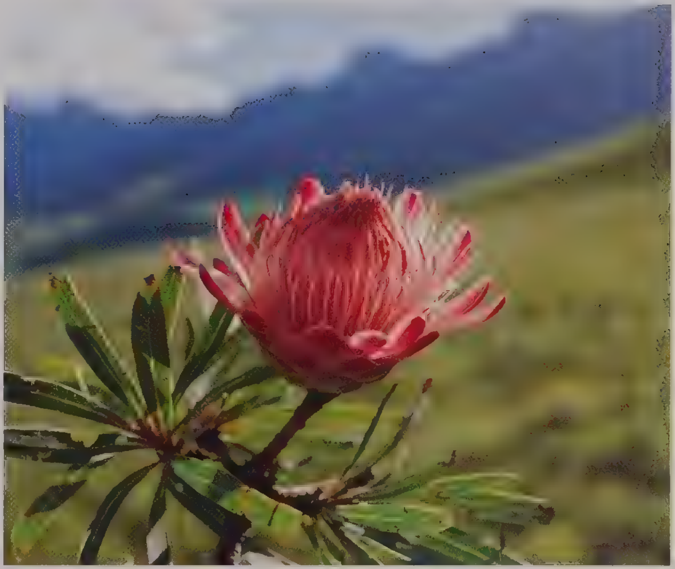
[1] There is doubt regarding the specific names of the various *Dierama* species. Dr K D. Gordon-Gray points out that the genus is badly in need of revision and that "any specific names that are applied at present are open to question".

Dieramas. Much more interesting, however, and very beautiful, is *D. igneum*. This is a dwarf variety, only about 20 cm high, and it usually grows on the summit, at an altitude of 3 000 m. There are two colour varieties, a rose red and a deep purplish-magenta. It grows in colonies, and I have often seen the hillsides on the summit covered in a rich carpet of crimson and purple. Why this species should be so different to the other *Dieramas* is something of a puzzle to botanists. At the high altitudes at which this flower grows there is an increase in the intensity of ultraviolet light, and it is believed that these rays inactivate the growth-promoting hormones, resulting in dwarf characteristics. The same phenomenon has been observed in several other Drakensberg flowers.

One of the most beautiful of the spring flowers is the *Watsonia*, very similar in appearance to the *Gladiolus*. In the Drakensberg there are five species, the bright pink *Watsonia confusa* and *W. lepida*, and *W. sociumi* (*W. meriana*), and they are very easily distinguished. You will find *W. lepida* growing singly in the lower grasslands, usually in October. It appears to be more common in the northerly parts, around the Royal Natal National Park. As one proceeds south it becomes more scarce, and only isolated specimens are to be found in the Giant's Castle area. The flower consists of a very distinctive spike of bright magenta flowers, as many as 22 to a spike, and all opening at the same time. The Zulu name for this flower is *uTshumo*, and the flower stem is used by the Zulus to *tshuma* with when smoking *insangu*, or dagga. *Tshuma* means literally to spit through a reed. Among the Zulus dagga is smoked through an *igudu*, or smoking horn, while the men sit round in a circle on the floor of a hut. The horn is passed round from one to another, each man taking a deep draw and filling his mouth with smoke. He then blows spittle through the stem of a *Watsonia* on to the floor of the hut, the spittle forming patterns of tiny bubbles full of smoke. The game is to see who can form the most intricate patterns. *W. confusa*, which grows in clumps, is so-called because it was incorrectly known as *W. densiflora* which is found at lower altitudes (from the midlands to the coast).

W. socium [= *W. pillansii*] is a particularly beautiful flower — deep orange in colour, and growing at a somewhat higher altitude to *W. confusa*. Again in contrast to the latter species, it does not grow singly, but in colonies, and always among stones and rocks. I have never seen it growing in open grasslands. On the stony hillsides of the Little Berg it makes a brave show in early spring with its bright orange flowers against the grey of the rocks. It has apparently been declared a noxious weed in Australia.



Protea dracomontana John Hone

Of all the wild flowers of the Drakensberg the easiest for the beginner to start off with is perhaps the protea, as it is easily recognised and identified. Drakensberg proteas are of the summer rainfall type, and there are six species to consider. The one that is most easily identified is *Protea roupelliae*. This is a fairly large tree, up to 4 m in height. The leaves are covered with a woolly down, which gives the young leaves their typical silvery sheen. Take a close look at the flowers, which are usually a bright red. They are saucer-shaped, and about 10 cm in diameter. Round the rim are what appear to be petals, but these are not petals. They are called bracts. The centre of the flower is made up of a mass of closely packed tiny flowers, each with a stamen protruding from its centre. Notice that the bracts are spoon-shaped, and that the stamens are shorter than the bracts. It is these two features which distinguish *P. roupelliae* from the other Drakensberg proteas, together with the fact that the tree itself is of a particularly graceful shape. This protea was named after Arabella Roupell of the Cape, who published a beautifully illustrated book on South African wild flowers early in the nineteenth century.

Another tree-type protea in the Drakensberg is *P. caffra* (it used to be called *P. multibracteata)*, and it is easily distinguished from *P. roupelliae*. To begin with, it is not a graceful tree. The branches are gnarled and twisted and black, and the tree is often an irregular shape. The flowers, too, are different. They are also saucer-shaped, but the bracts are oval, and the stamens are much longer than the bracts. This gives the flower its typical "spiky" appearance. There are two colour varieties, a cream and a rose-red.

The third protea is *P. subvestita*, which means "partly clothed", a reference to the woolly covering of the leaves. This protea is smaller than the other two, seldom growing higher than 3 m. The trees are more closely packed together than the two other species we have discussed, and while *P. roupelliae* and *P. caffra* are rounded in shape with thick bark, *P. subvestita* is more slender with thin smooth bark. The flowers also differ, those of *P. subvestita* being smaller, campanulate, or bell-shaped, with the bracts curling outwards. There are two colour varieties, rosepink and cream. This protea grows at a higher level than the other two, seldom occurring below 1 850 m. It is fire-sensitive, with thin smooth bark, and only survives in areas, such as rocky slopes, where it is protected from fires.

The three remaining species are very different from the first three we have considered, for they are dwarf bushes, up to 1 m high. *P. dracomontana* is a particularly lovely flower, usually deep salmon in colour, with saucer-shaped flowers, and it grows at a higher level than any of the others we have discussed, usually at about the 2 100 m mark.

P. simplex is easily distinguished from *P. dracomontana*, for the flowers are usually a pale yellow, and are very similar to *P. caffra*. Its range and habitat is also very similar to the latter protea, and there is obviously a close relationship between the two species. The stems of *P. simplex* are unbranched and slender, while the stems of *P. dracomontana* are branched and stout.

The last protea, *P. nubigena*, was discovered in July 1964 by Elsie Esterhuizen, one of South Africa's foremost botanists, high up on the Policeman's Helmet Ridge in the Royal Natal National Park. But it was winter, the plants were not in flower, and it was not until 1978 that Dr John Rourke was finally able to visit the spot and list them as a new species. They grow on a steep, south-westfacing slope, high in the clouds. *Nubigena* means "born of the clouds", and this spot, barely 20 m by 10 m, is the only place in the world where they grow. None have been discovered anywhere else in the Drakensberg. So steep is the slope on which they grow that it is almost impossible to reach them without rope. There are probably not more than 50 plants altogether.

Dr John Rourke (right) and Robert Levitt celebrate the discovery of Protea nubigena on Policeman's Helmet Ridge in the Royal Natal National Park, 1978

R.E. Levitt

Few have seen them, for not only are they difficult to reach, but they bloom for only a short period late in March. In March 1980, led by Ranger Ron Physick, I was fortunate enough to visit the spot and photograph them.

Pollination of the Drakensberg proteas is usually by birds, and a most memorable sight is that of a malachite sunbird, with its flashing wings, visiting one of these lovely flowers. But pollination is also brought about by a metallic blue beetle, *Melyris natalensis*, and you will often find the flower heads, especially of *P. caffra*, infested with this little chap.

You should easily be able to recognise the bottlebrush, with its scarlet flowers and bright green leaves. It flowers in early spring. Like the proteas, this handsome tree, is found on the slopes of the Little Berg, usually at the foot of steep krantzes. Its botanical name is *Greyia sutherlandii*, named after Dr P.C. Sutherland, who played a prominent part in the development of the infant Colony of Natal. Sutherland was born at Lateron, Caithness, in 1822. As a boy he accompanied his parents to Nova Scotia, where he witnessed the arrival of the Royal William, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic. This event must have fired the youngster's imagination, because for the rest of his life he had a deep love for the sea, and an insatiable curiosity in all matters scientific. He graduated in medicine at the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, spent a vacation in West Africa, and then visited Greenland in 1845, at the age of only 23. Here he joined an expedition to try to find Sir John Franklin, who was missing in the Arctic; had an island named after him (he has been called the Sir Vivian Fuchs of early Victorian times); and then in 1853 he decided to emigrate to Natal. He was one of the first medical men to come out to this country. From then on he achieved success after success. Three years after his arrival, he became Surveyor-General, a position he held until 1887. In 1857 he took charge of the whole public works of the Colony. He became chairman of the Harbour Board, and was appointed Government Geologist (he discovered the renowned Dwyka Formation, previously known as the Dwyka Series, one of the oldest rock formations in South Africa). In addition to all this, he became a botanist of repute, and was one of the founders of the Pietermaritzburg Botanical Society, having several plants named after him. Cecil Rhodes, as a young man of 16, was placed in his charge. He must have known the Drakensberg well, for both his geological and his botanical work must have often brought him into this mountain region. *Greyia sutherlandii*, with its rough dark bark, bright green leaves and even brighter red flowers, is a worthy memorial to this most accomplished man.

Burchellia bubalina, named after another fascinating character, the traveller W.J. Burchell, is also worth noting. This is a small tree with glossy green leaves, and it is often found growing on the forest edges along the banks of streams. It has red or orange trumpet-shaped flowers, growing in clusters, and you cannot mistake it. It is a great favourite with the birds, and the Zulu name for it is *uTshwala bezinyoni obukhulu*, meaning "beer for the birds — the large one". According to the Zulus, a cold water infusion made from the pounded roots is a cure for bad dreams!

There is another shrub in the Drakensberg which also has the Zulu name *uTshwala bezinyoni*, but with the additive *obuncane*, "the small one". This is the well-known Leonotis, a flower you cannot miss in the autumn time, round about Easter. The stems are long and tough, growing to a height of 1,5 m, and the flowers, which are a rich orange in colour, are produced in dense rosettes at intervals on the stem. It grows at the lower levels, in the valleys of the Little Berg, and it is sometimes called wild dagga. This is because the dried leaves are smoked by the Zulus, and are shaped rather like the leaves of the true dagga, *Cannabis sativa*. It is, however, entirely unrelated, nor has it any narcotic properties. It does, however, have many medicinal uses. It appears to possess purgative properties, and is also used as a cure for skin diseases. The Zulus use it as a remedy for colds, and also as a reputed cure for snakebite. The whole plant, except the roots, is used in a decoction as a tonic for calves. The plant is boiled in water until the decoction is the colour of brown sherry, and the dose is half a litre twice or three times a week.

Another small tree which you might notice is the Christmas bush, *Pavetta cooperi*. Its heavily scented, snow white blooms appear about Christmas time, hence the common name, and the long, delicate white styles make identification easy. The Zulus use it in a strange way. They call it *Isanyana*, and when any members of a kraal have a grudge against men of another kraal, they make an infusion from the roots of the tree. This is then used to *phalaza*[1] with before a beer drink, and this, it is believed, will cause the death of the children of those they hate.

When spring comes to the valleys of the Little Berg the hillsides are transformed by a rich treasure-store of flowers. Here you will find the ox-eye daisy, *Callilepis laureola*. The flowers are of the daisy type, the petals creamy-white, with black centres. They are about 6 cm in diameter, and the stems run to a height of 30 cm. They are, indeed, a lovely sight, nodding in the breeze and spangling the young green grass of early spring with white. They are especially prolific in the Cathedral area. *Laureola* means a small laurel crown or garland, while *calli* is the Greek word for beautiful. The genus consists of three species, all indigenous to the Transvaal, with two species found in Natal. The Zulu name is *Ihlamau*, possibly also *Impila*, which means "good health". An infusion is made from the pounded roots and given to barren women to aid conception. It is very poisonous and responsible for many deaths when the incorrect dose is applied.

Here, too, you will find the *Aristeas*, dainty little flowers with a blue that rivals the blue of the summer sky. They have six petals, and they belong to the family *Iridaceae*, named after Iris, goddess of the rainbow, because of the many beautiful colours of the flowers in this family. The flowers are only about a centimetre in diameter, and once picked they quickly twist up into a spiral and turn black. In some species the stems are about 40 cm long, each stem bearing several flowers. In other species, such as *Aristea cognata*, the stems are only about 6 cm long, with a single flower at the tip of the stem. The Zulus use this flower in a variety of ways. When a young man goes courting he will make an infusion from the roots and leaves and bathe his body beforehand with the mixture. This same infusion, when heated, is used as a fomentation for sprains, and it is also sprinkled in kraals as a protection against storms.

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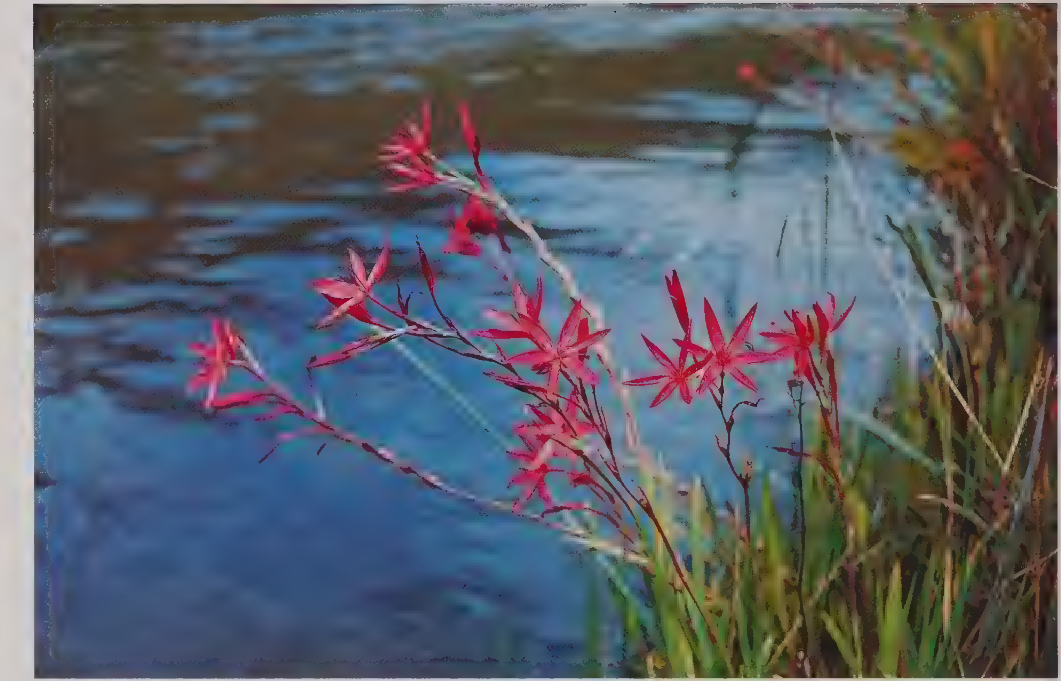
[1] To *phalaza* is one of the oldest customs of the Zulus. Certain herbs, or the bark of trees, or sometimes roots, are pounded and then mixed with hot or cold water. To *phalaza*, the Zulu first drinks a quantity of this liquid. He then takes up a kneeling position and tickles his throat to cause vomiting. This is supposed to cleanse the stomach and, as mentioned, has many other magical effects.



Scarlet River Lily (Hesperantha coccinea)

Malcolm Pearse

Two very charming flowers may often be found on the banks of streams. *Hesperantha coccinea*, commonly known as the scarlet river lily, blooms in late summer. The flowers are deep crimson in colour, and have a satin-like sheen to their petals. They are a beautiful sight as they nod their heads in the autumn sunlight over the clear waters of a hurrying stream. There is also a pink variety, somewhat rare (quite common in the Cavern valley). I have seen it only twice in the Drakensberg, once in the Setene valley, below Mount Oompie, and once on the Free State slopes of the Drakensberg, above Cavern Berg Resort.

The second is *Cyrtanthus breviflorus*, a bright yellow flower that grows in clusters on stream banks in the spring with long green slender leaves, about 15 cm long. The flowers have six petals, like a small lily, and they are only about 2 to 3 cm in length. In the past there was considerable uncertainty as to the correct name of this flower. It was originally classified under *Cyrtanthus*, but *Cyrtanthus* flowers have long, pendulous trumpet-shaped flowers, while the flowers of this species are much shorter and more widespreading. It was therefore given a special classification, and called *Anoiganthus*. But botanists were still not sure of this, and the whole question was further bedevilled by the fact that there appeared to be a number of subspecies. At one time two separate species were recognised, *Anoiganthus breviflorus* and *A. luteus*. Finally Dr K.D. Gordon-Gray of the University of Natal and Dr F.B. Wright of the Natal Parks Board made an extensive study of the plant in the early 1960s, and came to the conclusion that the original name, *Cyrtanthus breviflorus*, should be reverted to, and that only one species, *C. breviflorus*, should be recognised. This suggestion was adopted.

But perhaps, after all, the flower itself has the last word, for its Zulu name is *Uvelabahleke*, which means "the happy, laughing flower". And what lovelier name could it have, as it laughs happily away in the sun, on the banks of the Little Berg, as the botanists wrangle over its scientific name!

There are many other *Cyrtanthus* flowers in the Drakensberg. Writing in 1855, Reverend Wiliam C. Holden remarked: "Two or three days after fire has blackened the earth, countless numbers of a little (scarlet) leafless flower ... shoot up, whose bowed heads seem to supplicate heaven's mercy for the scorched earth, and whose beauty is enough to entice the treasures of the clouds to their feet." He was thinking of that lovely red flower, *Cyrtanthus contractus*, popularly known as the fire lily. I have never been quite sure whether the popular name derives from the fact that it is often found on the blackened veld after a grass fire, or whether it comes from its flame-like colour. It always flowers before the leaves appear. The Zulu name is *Umpingizane*, and it is used by the Zulus as an *intelezi*, a protective medicine or charm which is designed to render evil ineffective. It is supposed to ward off all forms of evil and sickness. In the case of *C. contractus* the bulbs are crushed, a concoction is made from them, and the mixture used to sprinkle yards and huts to prevent evil entering.

Two other species of *Cyrtanthus* are worth noting. *C. flanaganii* is a rich yellow in colour, with dark green, sword-like, glabrous leaves. It grows to a height of about 40 cm, and is found in damp places on the summit plateau, at about 3 100 m, often growing below moist basalt cliffs and in shady places – a Drakensberg endemic (found there and nowhere else). *C. erubescens* is a strikingly beautiful pink species shading to pure white. It is only rarely seen, and is again found in sheltered places on the summit plateau and down to the upper reaches of the Little Berg (another Berg endemic). I once found a white, pink-tipped variety at the foot of Amphlett's.

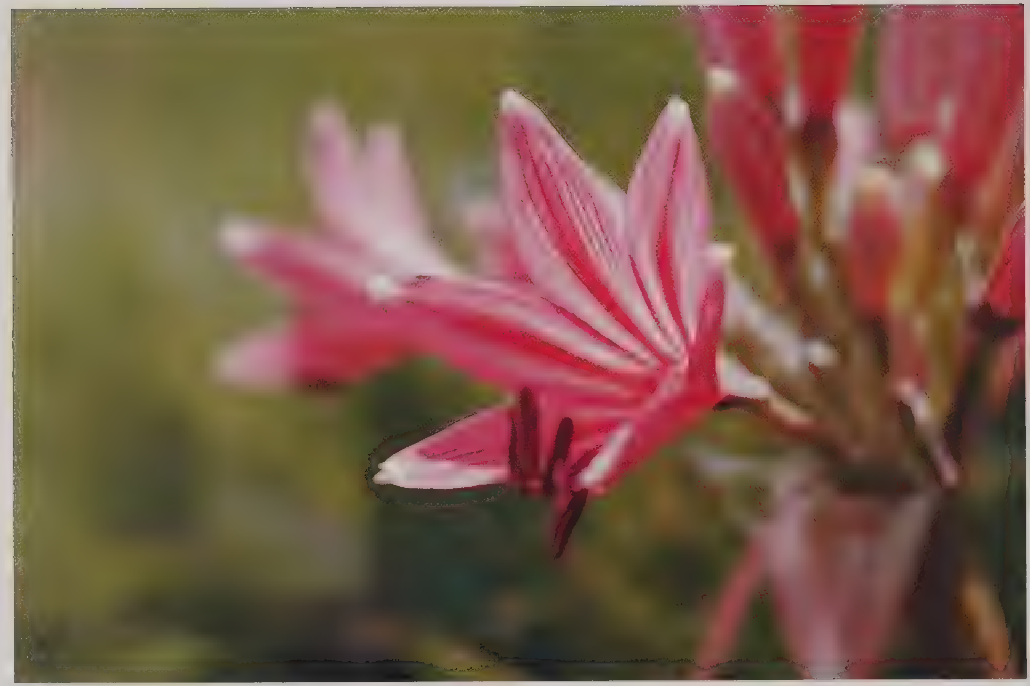
The genus name *Cyrtanthus* comes from a Greek word meaning "curved flower". This makes its identification very easy, for the flowers are long, slender and trumpet-shaped, and always hang downwards in a graceful curve.

One of the most showy of all Drakensberg wild flowers is the *Brunsvigia*. These handsome lilies bloom in December and January, and are to be found in open grasslands, but sometimes under the sandstone rock ledges of the Little Berg. They consist of a large, fleshy stalk, about 30 cm high, which terminates in a cluster of scarlet flowers of the lily type, branching out in a large sphere from the tip of the fleshy stalk. Each flower has its own smaller stalk which is 15 cm to 20 cm long. There are two types of leaf. In *B. radulosa* the leaves lie flat on the ground and are fleshy and heart-shaped, and in *B. grandiflora* the leaves are long and strap-shaped. Eventually these flower heads with their long thick stalks dry out and go whirling away across the veld. You will often find them caught up in fences at the sides of roads. The plant has a large bulb, full of water, and this often makes a layer of wet mud round the bulb, with a strong, rotten odour. Hence the Zulu name, *Umbolo*, meaning "something rotten".

An interesting creeper, which is sometimes found on the edges of forest margins, is the climbing bell, *Littonia modesta*. The flowers consist of pendulous, orange bells, and the leaves are thin, slender and tapering. It was named after Dr Samuel Litton, Professor of Botany for 21 years in the Royal Dublin Society. The Zulu name is *Uhlamvu lwentombazane*. A decoction is made from the bulb of the plant, and from the bulb of a somewhat similar climber, *Gloriosa superba*, great care being exercised, as the bulbs are poisonous. When a young Zulu man, courting a girl, finds she is indifferent to his advances, he will first of all *phalaza* with the liquid. He then walks slowly past the girl, making sure his shadow falls on her. This is supposed to cause the girl to appear pregnant, and this condition will persist until she returns his affections. If, however, she is still reluctant, her father must consult an *Inyanga*, or witch-doctor. He then prescribes a concoction for her to *phalaza* with, consisting of the bulbs of both these plants, together with a few others for extra kick!

Red hot pokers

John Hone



Malcolm Pearse

Mid-summer blossoms

Brunsvigia radulosa flowers in December and January, mainly amongst the rocks on the summit of the Little Berg. The Zulu name is umBhola, meaning 'something rotten'. The plant's large bulb is usually full of water, making a layer of wet mud with a strong, rotten odour

No account of the flora of the Drakensberg would be complete without a reference to the bluebells, known to botanists as *Wahlenbergia*. There are about 15 species in the Drakensberg, and their blue, bell-shaped flowers nodding in the wind on the slopes of the Little Berg are a familiar sight to the hiker. One of them is known to the Zulus as *Uqaboza*. In the old days they would make a liquid from the pounded roots and use this to wash with before going into battle. It was supposed to act as a protection against the assegais of the enemy. It is also used as an eye lotion. Perhaps one of the finest is *Wahlenbergia grandiflora*, with its Zulu name *Umnqantula*. An infusion is made from the roots of this plant, and this is given to young pups after the removal of the worm from the tongue. When a young pup is ailing and refusing its food the Zulus remove the sinew or bridle under the tongue, believing this practice is a certain cure. There is a white variety of this flower, known to the Zulus as *Ushayindoda omhlope*. Herdboys who have carelessly allowed their cattle to stray are said to chew the roots of this plant to make themselves invisible to their wrathful fathers who come after them with a sjambok!

The blue of the bluebells reminds us of yet another blue flower, the lovely little *Lobelia*. These dainty little flowers, only a few centimetres high, are a common sight in the Drakensberg, especially along the bridle paths that thread the mountain sides. They have a narrow throat which ends with three broadly spreading petals and two smaller ones. Their colour is an intense blue, and they have small yellow centres. The genus was named after Mathias de l'Obel, physician to William the Silent, and later botanist to James I of England. He was the first professional botanist to illustrate South African flowers, in 1603.

Then, of course, there are the everlastings and the many varieties of wild heaths. Everlastings are known to botanists as *Helichrysums*, and they form a very large group of plants. Dr Killick found no less than 46 species in the Cathedral area alone, and there must be many more along the whole line of the Drakensberg. In the spring and early summer their brittle, bright beauty is a memorable sight on the summit of the Little Berg. Their colours range from white to golden yellow, deep scarlet, rose pink and whitish-pink. *H. sutherlandii* is not an everlasting, but is found extensively among the grey basalt rocks of the main Drakensberg. It has masses of foam-white flowers, and blue-grey leaves, and is a prominent feature of the mountain crags.

There is one other *Helichrysum* that is worth noting, and that is *H. trilineatum*, to which we have already referred. This is a tough, hard, woody shrub, 15-60 cm high with small yellow flowers, growing on the summit plateau, mostly in sheltered gullies at about the 3 000 m level. Its dried branches, 2 to 3 cm in diameter at most, provide the only firewood for the camper at these high altitudes. It makes a good fuel, as it has a very strong oil and resin content.

Everlastings (Helichrysum sp.) Malcolm Pearse

The heaths or *Ericas* form a large family of plants in South Africa. Altogether there are almost 600 species. There are about 30 species in the Drakensberg and Lesotho, many of them endemic to the region. They range from tiny plants growing to a height of only a few centimetres, to tall shrubs up to 3 m in height. Heaths may be recognised almost at a glance, from their leaves. These are generally short and needlelike, and arranged in little tufts. The flowers, which are small, are usually clustered very close together, and may be shaped like little bells, long, curved trumpets, or puffed tubes.

Perhaps the most showy and best known is *E. cerinthoides*. It is one of the most widely spread of the *Ericas*, being found throughout South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland and on into Central Africa, and it flowers throughout the year. It is usually a brilliant flame-red, but in the Drakensberg there is a rather rare variety with pinkish-red flowers, paling to white at the base of the tube. I once found a fine specimen in the Lower Ndedema Gorge, the only one I have ever come across. This plant is another which seems to thrive after winter fires.

E. oatesii is often to be seen in the sheltered valleys of the Little Berg, sometimes just above the sandstone layers. It has pink, bell-shaped flowers, and was named after Frank Oates, the English traveller and naturalist, who first collected the species in 1873.

In the deep, rich forests of the Little Berg you will find a wealth of shade-loving plants, which like a damp, moist atmosphere. Around you stand the immemorial trees, in silent dignity, reaching up their mighty evergreen crowns to the open sky. The lichen hangs in tessellated profusion from their boughs, and everywhere are the ferns, deep, and rich, and soft. Over all hangs the stillness of a great cathedral. No one who has stood entranced in these green solitudes will ever forget those huge mossed boulders and the rich tapestry of orange and purple which festoons their sides, an abiding memory for the lover of flowers.

The orange flowers are those of *Begonia sutherlandii*, another flower which enshrines the name of Dr P.C. Sutherland. They love wet, dripping ledges, and the south sides of rocks. The purple flowers are *Streptocarpus gardenii*, a genus which belongs to the same family as the Gloxinia. The name *Streptocarpus* comes from the Greek and means a twisted seedpod. Their seedpods have a twisted spiral in them, and when they dry out, the spiral relaxes like a spring and shoots out the seed, ensuring its wide dispersal.

Growing on the sides of waterfalls you will find two flowers which you cannot mistake. *Talbotia elegans* is a small blue flower, about 1,5 cm in diameter, with six petals and long, slender green leaves. The stem structure is a tough, slim central shoot, encased in old leaves and wiry roots, while the leaves are crowded at the top, giving it a plumed appearance.

Similar in size and shape to *T. elegans* is a red flower, *Hesperantha longituba*, which you will also find on the side of waterfalls and on wet rock ledges. *Hesperantha* means evening flower, and its common name, aandblom, or avondblommetjie, is really an Afrikaans translation of this Greek word.

The summit is entirely different from anything we have seen so far. In fact it is a typical tundra region. The soils are turfy and shallow, and derived entirely from basalt, dark in colour. They seldom exceed 40 cm in depth. In the rainy season they become boggy, and in winter are frozen hard for long periods. The surface of the soil is often covered with a litter of small stones. Flat rock pavements abound, and small, boggy vleis are very common. The climate is severe. Snow lies for months on end in the winter, though it must be remembered that this blanket of snow actually protects plants from excessively low temperatures, and prevents the soil beneath from freezing. Harsh winds blow in late winter, spring and early summer, and drought is by no means unknown. Rainfall on the summit is less than on the east-facing slopes of the Drakensberg, and decreases progressively as one leaves the escarpment edge and penetrates inland into Lesotho. Atmospheric pressure is decreased, and there is an increase in ultraviolet rays, which, as we have seen, is believed to be the chief cause of dwarfness in alpine plants. There is also a very wide range of soil temperature, from very hot during the day to very cold at night. Air temperatures generally are colder, and long periods of bitter cold have been experienced even in the height of summer. Humidity, also, varies tremendously, being very high in the wet, misty months of summer, and very low in winter.

The vegetation, of course, has to adapt itself to these harsh conditions. Much of it consists of low, woody species of *Erica* and *Helichrysum*, and short, tufty grasses. Many of the plants have grey or whitish leaves, another of nature's protective devices, which reduces the amount of radiation absorbed.

To me it is a perpetual wonder that in the face of these harsh conditions nature can produce such a lavish display of colour as she does on the summit of the Drakensberg. Hans Justus Thode, one of the early plant collectors in the Drakensberg, called the summit area "a veritable flower paradise". There may not be the wide range of species that you find at lower altitudes, but here you find great splashes of jewelled colour which you will not find lower down.

Hans Justus Thode

Perhaps the most striking plant on the summit is *Moraea alticola*, or the yellow iris. Growing to a height of 90 to 100 cm, it covers the hillsides and valleys with glorious splashes of golden colour. It is frequently found associated with the blue forget-me-not, *Myosotis sylvatica*, a delightful combination. Its Zulu name is *Ihlamvu elincane*. When a woman fails to conceive, the corm of this plant is ground up with two or three seed mealies, and from this three small cakes are made. The woman eats two of them, her husband eats one, and, hey presto, in no time you hear the patter of little feet!

The plants are poisonous to stock (farmers know it as tulp) but in spite of many years of intensive study of the plant, the exact nature of the poison has never been discovered to my knowledge. Strangely enough, the plants are eaten in large quantities by rodent moles without any ill effects.

An amazing coincidence occurred in the naming of this genus. A botanist gave it the name *Morea* in honour of a man named More. It was later discovered that Linnaeus had already named the genus *Moraea*, after his wife, the pronunciation being the same in both cases. In accordance with internationally established procedure, the later name had to be dropped in favour of *Moraea* the earlier, and original, one.

The red-hot pokers, known as *Kniphofias*, also make a fine show on the summit, and I have seen hectares of them, their proud heads standing like crimson and yellow banners against the blue of the sky. *Kniphofia caulescens* is the species that you will find growing around the small vleis and streams that are so common on the summit. It has bright orange to red tips, shading to yellow at the base, and grows to a height of 90 cm. Three other species of red-hot pokers found on the summit are *K. northiae*, *K. porphyrantha*, and *K. ritualis*. The genus was named after Johann Hieronymus Kniphof, Professor of Medicine at Erfurt University in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

A very striking flower near the summit is *Gladiolus flanaganiii*. It was previously incorrectly identified as *G. cruentus*, a red-flowering species confined to the cliffs of the Krantzkloof gorge near Durban. In the Drakensberg there are many species of *Gladiolus*, those magnificent “sword lilies”, as they have been called. “From their native fortresses on Table Mountain,” says M. James, FRHS, “they have stormed the floral citadels of the world.” And he is right, for the horticultural hybrids, derived from our South African gladioli, seem to grow more magnificent every year. *G. flanaganiii* has a brilliant scarlet colour, and it is popularly known as the suicide lily because it grows on the sheer rock faces of the basalt cliffs, is most difficult to reach, and is only very rarely seen. One Christmas, however, I found the cliffs of Little Saddle in the Ndedema area simply ablaze with them.

There are many other species to be found on the summit, including *Cyrtanthus*, *Dierama*, *Rhodohypoxis*, the *Nerines* and the *Ericas*, but we have no time to mention them here. These lonely heights can be harsh and forbidding, but their harshness is tempered by the soft beauty of the mountain flowers, growing in peace among the mountain crags, with only the wind for company.

* * *

Today, in the Midlands of Natal, you will find the smoke of factory chimneys, the roar of machinery, the highways and byways filling up with hurrying crowds. There are times when one simply wants to get away from it all, to sit beside a mountain stream, and contemplate the simple beauty of a wild flower. One can do this easily, for the Drakensberg is only 50 km away. You will be in good company! Two thousand years ago there was Another, who also saw the toiling crowds, and felt them pressing in upon Him. He called a few of His friends, and climbed with them the green hillside that rose serene above the Lake of Galilee. He sat there among the flowers on a summer’s day. “Consider,” He said, “the lilies of the field. *They* toil not, neither do they spin, but I say unto you that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
The publishers record their appreciation to Elsa Pooley for revising and editing this chapter for publication.

John Hone

Above: More than half the world's iris species, of which the Watsonia is the most hardy, grow in South Africa
Right: Golden Euryopos tysonii bring a splash of colour to the grey rocks amongst which they cluster in the Injisuthi area

John Hone

CHAPTER 19

THE MEN WHO GUARDED THE TREES

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me
Come hither ...
Shakespeare, As You Like It

Tuesday morning, 25 July 1967, was a black, wet, dripping morning. The dawn was still two hours away. Heavy mist blanketed the mountains and valleys of the Little Berg. The night pressed heavy on the land. Over the deep snowdrifts which choked the ravines of Cathkin Peak, dark shadows lay. In the bedroom at the Monk's Cowl Forest Station Steve Rossouw, the foreman-in-charge, was awake. His wife, Joyce, was still asleep. Steve always woke early these days. It was a good time to plan the work of the day. If only the mist would lift he could burn that firebreak down from inDanyane past the forests of the Upper Makuruman. It was 4.30 am and too early to make coffee. He drew the blankets up close around him, for it was cold. From outside came the only sound, the steady drip drip-drip of the dank mist from the liquidambar trees.

Suddenly the silence of the night was shattered by a frantic hammering at the door. It woke Joyce, but Steve was first at the door. On the steps outside was a young man, haggard, exhausted, on the point of collapse. Quickly he told his story. He was Peter Keen. He and his brother, Dr Anthony Keen, had set out along the Contour Path four days previously on a traverse from Cathedral Peak to Champagne Castle. The previous afternoon, at Base Camp in the uMhlwazini valley, Anthony had suffered a heart attack. The two men had attempted to climb up and out of the uMhlwazini Valley, then to descend the Little Berg to Champagne Castle Hotel, but Anthony had collapsed for the second time. His brother had placed him in two sleeping-bags, and laid him on a stretched-out tent alongside the path, and had gone for help after Anthony had written down his diagnosis on a slip of paper. Peter had arrived at the hotel about 9 pm, and with two of the hotel waiters had returned up the Little Berg and over to where he had left his brother down in the uMhlwazini valley. Together they had tried to carry the stricken man, using the sleeping-bag as a makeshift stretcher, but had found it impossible. Through the night, in the icy winter weather, Peter had again descended the Little Berg, and this time he had stumbled into the Monk's Cowl Forest Station.

Steve and Joyce, a trained nurse, immediately swung into action. A cup of steaming tea and food were prepared for the exhausted man, while Steve phoned the hotel 3 km away, alerting them to the emergency, and asking for a stretcher and a rescue party to be assembled immediately. Then another call to the Estcourt telephone exchange, with an urgent request that they attempt to locate a helicopter. The reply came 15 minutes later: two local helicopters were unavailable. A third call was made to an Estcourt doctor, to whom Peter read his brother's diagnosis. The doctor promised to alert the Defence Department, with a request to them for a helicopter from either Bloemfontein or Durban, and he also promised to send an ambulance out. Yet another call to Durban, to the parents of the two men. In between calls Steve despatched an advance party of forest guards up the mountain, with food and blankets. Then Steve and his wife drove Peter Keen over to the hotel. Here he was immediately put to bed, and was asleep within five minutes. Steve collected the stretcher and then returned to the Forest Station, where Joyce swiftly packed a rucksack with hot tea and sandwiches. Then, with Peter's last words ringing in their ears — "Hurry, for God's sake: he may not last long" — they sped off, taking a short cut up the mountainside, while the stretcher party took the longer route up the bridle path. It was now 6.45 am, and the light was just breaking. They left their daughter, Caroline, a child of 12, in charge of the station, to look after their four younger children and to man the telephone for any incoming calls.

Through heavy mist they climbed up, and reached the summit of the Little Berg at Breakfast Stream in 25 minutes, the usual time for the climb being an hour. Then swiftly along the summit plateau and on to Hlathikhulu Nek. An icy wind began to blow off the snow, and the mist was still heavy, but at Hlathikhulu Nek it grew lighter, and when at 8.55 am they reached the stricken man, the sun was just beginning to break through.

They found Anthony beside the path, halfway down the uMhlwazini valley. He was conscious, his pulse was strong and steady, and he said he felt better. Soon after that the stretcher party arrived, and arrangements were made for the return trip.

Typical forest of the Little Berg

John Hone

In the meantime, little Caroline, down at the forest station, had been kept busy. Competently, she handled all incoming calls — from the parents of the two men, from eager newspaper reporters, from the Estcourt doctor, and from Defence Headquarters. At about 7.30 am came a call with the news that an Air Force helicopter was on its way from Bloemfontein. Caroline's younger brother, Stephen, a young lad of 10, immediately offered to climb the mountains, which tower above the forest station, with the news. Alone, barefoot, and with only one thin pullover, the boy made the journey of over 12 km in less than two hours, along treacherous footpaths shrouded in mist, and covered in places with snow and ice. He arrived just as the stretcher party was about to set off.

Down below the mist became thicker, and Caroline took another telephone call to the effect that the helicopter could not get through because of the mist. She realised that the rescue party might be waiting in vain for the machine, and she decided she must go herself to warn them that they would have to depend on themselves to get the sick man down. She did not hesitate a moment. Leaving the three younger children in the charge of a servant, she set off immediately, taking with her only her father's three dogs, Mutt, Luxy and Toasty, for protection. Up through the mountains she, too, climbed, delivered her message, together with one from the Estcourt doctor urging them to press on, and immediately returned to her post at the station to prepare food and hot drinks for the return of the rescue party.

All this time the stretcher party was toiling on, manoeuvring the stretcher over mountain streams and along steep krantzes and narrow footpaths. As they climbed up out of the uMhlwazini valley the mist came down again, heavier than ever, thick, black, wet and dripping. It turned bitterly cold, the wind gusting in icy blasts. Little Stephen, still barefoot, was visibly frozen, even though Caroline had given him her own pullover before she had left for home. The little fellow was almost in tears. By the time they reached Blind Man's Corner they were all wet through. They battled on.

At last, when they reached the Sphinx, the huge sandstone rock just below the summit of the Little Berg, the mist began to lift. Down below the Alouette helicopter had by now arrived at the forest station, together with the ambulance and oxygen. As soon as the pilot saw the rescue party at the Sphinx, far above him, he took off, landed just below the rock, picked up Dr Keen and flew him down to the forest station. There his father was waiting for him. A brief halt while the patient's condition was checked, and then the whirling blades began to turn again as the machine took off for Grey's Hospital in Pietermaritzburg. Steve and his wife watched it growing smaller and smaller until it was a speck against the drifting clouds. Then they turned to their work. There was dinner to prepare for five hungry children, and it was still early enough to start that firebreak down from inDanyane. Steve called to his labourers. It had been just one more day in the life of a Government Forester.

Steve Rossouw

'Berg cycad (Encephalartos ghellinckii) frame the snow-clad Monk's Cowl in the uMhlwazini Valley Dave Osborne

The Drakensberg has two priceless treasures, its water and its forests. There is water everywhere — the purest, clearest, most sparkling water to be found anywhere in South Africa. It spouts, trickles, gushes and gurgles on all sides. Even after heavy rain it is still as clear and limpid as a washed diamond as it tumbles down the mountainside. The rivulets join to form the most delightful of mountain streams, while rapids foam and splash into sparkling pools, green and translucent. Hurrying on their way, tossing their white spray into the sun-drenched air, the streams expand and grow, and then their pace slows down until they broaden out into the great rivers that feed the uThukela Basin and the mighty sinews of industry and agriculture far below in the plains of Natal.

Equally lovely, and closely associated with the hurrying streams, are the forests. Here great yellowwoods, *Podocarpus latifolius* and *P. henkelii*, tower up in lonely valleys, the gloom is green and cool, and always there is the sound of rippling waters. Here you will find the stately *without* (use the Afrikaans *"vit-hote"*, not the English pronunciation!), or Cape holly, *Ilex mitis*, with its shiny, dark green leaves and white bark; the wild peach, or spekhout, *Kiggelaria africana*; the black ironwood, *Olea capensis*; the white stinkwood, *Celtis africana*; and the Cape chestnut, *Calodendrum capense*, with its bright clusters of pink and mauve flowers that make such a glory in the spring. Smaller trees are *Dais cotinifolia*, the pompom tree; *Halleria lucida*, with its rich golden, heavily scented flowers in the spring; *Curtisia dentata*, the assegai tree, and the cabbage tree, *Cussonia spicata*. In autumn the forest trees are ablaze with the yellow flare of the canary creeper, *Senecio tamoides*.

I have been in love with forests for as long as I can remember. As a boy I used to venture, timorously at first, because of the silence, into the cathedral gloom of the great forests of the Dargle, and wonder at their mystery and their sense of ageless time. Stretched out, chin in hands, on the floor of my bedroom, oblivious to all else, I would pore over Longfellow's "This is the forest primeval, the murmuring pines and the hemlocks". The sonorous lines would drift through my mind like the wind drifting through the leaves of the forest itself. And later, as a young man, I wandered through the Forest of Arden with the spritely Rosalind, and fell hopelessly in love with her. I spent long nights under the pines with Robert Louis Stevenson, while his donkey cropped the short nearby grass and the night wind whispered in the trees, and we dreamed of far-off lands. And in later life I came to know and to love the forests of the Drakensberg.

It was to protect these two priceless treasures, the water and the forests, that the first forest reserves in the Drakensberg were proclaimed in 1922.

The indigenous forests of the Drakensberg are found mostly in the deep valleys of the Little Berg, especially on their south-facing slopes. This is partly owing to the greater shade and moisture found there, but also because of the direction of the autumn and winter fires which sweep across the land. These fires burn from north to south, owing to the prevailing north-westerly winds, and are much fiercer on the drier north-facing slopes, where they race upwards, than on the moister south-facing slopes, where they burn slowly downwards, and cause little damage to forested areas. Only occasional trees occur above these river valleys, and apart from *Leucosidea sericea*, the well-known *umMtshitshi* bush, the tree line ends at about the 1 980 m level.

In the early days very little had been done to protect these indigenous forests on Crown Land. Their control was vested in the magistrates of the districts in which the forests occurred. Various enactments were made under Ordinance No. 4 of 1853, but these were unsatisfactory and there were no means of enforcing them. In fact the only control appeared to be the issue of permits to sawyers who wished to cut timber. This system dates from 1855. These permits cost £l per month for each saw, but there was no control over the number of trees a man cut down or the damage that was done in the process, and the sawyers did pretty much as they liked. The police were supposed to make periodic patrols of the forests in their areas to check that no unauthorised persons were cutting wood, but in practice little appears to have been done. In the early 1880s a limited system of employing local farmers, called variously Supervisors of Crown Forests, or Honorary Foresters, was tried out. These men worked at a salary of £36 per annum, and were given the right to arrest people who were cutting timber illegally. One of the first of these was George Leonard Coventry, who was given control of the forests in the Mont-aux-Sources area. G.L. Coventry was the father of Walter Coventry, who started the first hotel at what subsequently became the Royal Natal National Park. The system, certainly in its early stages, proved to be of little value. In 1902 the Lister Report stated: "The forests of Natal and Zululand are now being wrecked and plundered." Fortunately, problems of transport meant that the Drakensberg forests suffered less than those in other parts of Natal.

Both the Bulwer Commission of 1880 and Dr H.G. Fourcade's Report of 1899 had urged the establishment of a Department of Forestry, but nothing seems to have been done until the end of 1902, when T.R. Sim was appointed Conservator of Forests as a result of the Lister Report.

One of Sim's first tasks after he had created and staffed the new Forestry Department was to extend the system of Honorary and Part-time Foresters. These men were required to protect patches of indigenous forests by burning breaks round them, and to report cases of illegal cutting and poaching. Probably owing to their remoteness, however, nothing seems to have been done in the case of the Cathkin-Cathedral area until 1922.

In July 1910, at the age of 21, young Carter Robinson bought the farm Benjamin, under the shadow of Cathkin Peak, from Jan Koos van der Merwe, and erected the first buildings which were later to grow into the

Monk's Cowl Forest Station. Early in 1922 he made strong representations to the Government, and as a result of these, the Cathkin Forest Reserve was proclaimed in April 1922 in terms of Section 122 of the South Africa Act, 1909. The Reserve stretched from Injisuthi to the uMlambonje Rivers, and was 40 468 ha (nearly 100 000 acres) in extent. The system of issuing permits for tree-felling was stopped, and the only source of revenue was the leasing of selected areas of the reserve to farmers for grazing purposes. In January 1924 Carter Robinson was appointed Honorary Forester, and in September of the following year he became Stipendiary Part-time Forester at £5 a month, but from November 1933 he reverted to the position of Honorary Forester. He held this post until the end of 1934, when he resigned, and was succeeded by Otto Zunckel. On 4 February 1935 the Department of Agriculture and Forestry wrote to Robinson thanking him for "the excellent service" he had rendered. "Forestry officials," said the letter, "speak very highly of the enthusiasm and able way in which you have guarded the Department's interests during the past 11 years, and I can assure you that the work you have done is very much appreciated."

But in spite of all Robinson's efforts, little was done to make the Reserve viable. In 1931 the District Forest Officer in Pietermaritzburg recommended that the Reserve be declared a National Park, or handed over to the Provincial authorities as an extension to the Giant's Castle Game Reserve. He considered it quite useless as a forest reserve. The revenue from grazing only just covered Robinson's salary, plus the small current expenditure on paths. To give an indication of the scope of the Reserve in those days we might mention that total expenditure for the seven years 1926 to 1932 was only £1 030, while revenue for the same period only came to £936.

In 1932 a new post of Forest Watcher appeared to have been created, and S.G. Streit was employed in this capacity, as from 1 January 1932, at a salary of £1 a month. Early in 1934 Streit was drowned in the uThukela River while searching for the body of one of the Zunckel family who had perished in the floods of that year.

In 1934 the Government bought Robinson's farm Benjamin, and converted it into the first fully equipped Forest Station in the area. Two years later J. van Heyningen was appointed to the station as the first full-time forester in charge of the Reserve.

The management of a State Forest embraced, among other things, the conservation of all indigenous vegetation; the planning and application of protective measures against fires, pests, animals, and the intrusion of alien vegetation and undesirable plants; control of poaching; planning and regulating access to the State Forests by the public, and sometimes supplying accommodation; the dissemination of popular, semi-popular and scientific information on the Reserve and on forestry matters generally; and catchment management.

In order to cope with this enhanced programme, it was decided early in 1935 to expand and reorganise the whole State Forest area. The headquarters of the area were transferred from the Monk's Cowl Forest Station to the Cathedral area, and it was decided to establish a Forestry Research Station there.

What triggered this move was the controversy which arose during the first three decades of the century on the effects of afforestation on water supplies. The opening shots in what was to develop into a battle royal were apparently fired in 1915 by O.B. Miller, a forest officer in the South African Forestry Department. He wrote: "I have observed that after their surroundings have been planted with fast-growing exotics, there is a tendency for springs to dry up." Soon there was quite an uproar. Others joined in. Letters appeared in the Press. On several occasions the matter was raised in Parliament. It was discussed by farmers' congresses and similar organisations throughout the country.

On the one hand there were those who agreed with Miller. These protagonists maintained that there was abundant evidence that trees used up an enormous amount of water, and desiccated the land. On the other side were an equal number who argued that trees brought moisture and rain to the land. They pointed to the rain forests of Central Africa, and to the fact that the forests of Natal and Zululand were always damp and moist. Farmers in the Natal Midlands claimed that wattle plantations had dried up springs which flowed again when the trees were felled. But against this Mr Hunt-Holley, for instance, maintained that "springs running out of wattle plantations" were seen "where none were ever seen before".

But was it fair to blame afforestation for this? Could not other factors be involved, such as urban, industrial or agricultural development, plus, of course, climatic changes? And was there a difference between indigenous forests and exotic plantations? It was obviously a very complex problem, and when the experts were approached they could give no clear answer.

Then in 1935 the British Empire Forestry Conference was held in Cape Town. The Government asked the conference to pay special attention to the problem, and in particular to concentrate on the effect of afforestation on climate, water conservation, stream-flow and erosion. The conference appointed a committee to study the problem and to make recommendations, and the committee suggested that a comprehensive scientific investigation on the effects of tree-planting upon local water supplies would be of value, not only to South Africa but also to other parts of the Empire. "South Africa," they said, "has a unique opportunity of carrying out such an investigation."

The Government lost no time in acting on this suggestion. It was decided to establish two research stations in South Africa, one in the winter rainfall area and one in the summer rainfall area. That year a site was chosen for the Jonkershoek Research Station, near Stellenbosch in the Cape, and later it was decided to establish a similar research station in the Drakensberg.

Late in 1935 Dr I. J. Craib, Chief Forest Research Officer, and S. St. C. Ballenden, Conservator of Forests in Pietermaritzburg, selected the site for the station at Cathedral Peak, together with 2 500 acres (1 000 ha) which were to be set aside for research purposes. This area comprised part of the farm Gewaagd and part of the existing Forest Reserve. The farm was originally owned by Salmon Scholtz, and he erected a building which eventually formed the nucleus of the Research Station. I.J.M. ("Ryk Isak") Buys, who was farming at Kransfontein in the Free State, bought the farm from Scholtz, and he sent Jan P. Roux down as his foreman to run it. Round about 1928 Jannie Roux bought Ryk Isak out, and in 1938 the rest of the farm was incorporated in the Cathkin Peak Forest Reserve.

The man selected to launch the infant project was A.M. ("Mike") de Villiers, a young Assistant District Forest Officer at George in the Cape. He paid a flying visit to the area in June 1938, before proceeding to Pietermaritzburg for a month to organise materials and equipment. He came to wild and almost inaccessible country. The hotel had not been completed. The road into the area from Winterton was in places so bad that it often degenerated into a series of tracks across the veld, hopelessly mixed up with sledge trails branching off in all directions. On his first visit he got hopelessly lost. With dusk coming on, he took a wrong turning a few kilometres before the uMhlwazini crossing, and had to spend the night in his car.

Conditions in those early days, too, were primitive in the extreme. Jannie Roux had recently lost his wife and could not bear living in the old homestead at Gewaagd, but he had been given the contract to build the bridge over the uMhlwazini. So De Villiers found temporary quarters in the old house, while Roux camped out at the bridge. At first there were no bridges at all over the rivers, and the roads, especially after heavy rains, were quite impassable. Often his supplies ran out, and, unable to get into Winterton or Bergville to replenish them, he had to fall back on his labourer's mealie-meal. Pulling cars out of the mud with teams of oxen became a regular occurrence. H.B. Stephens, who had taken over as Conservator of Forests in 1938, and who often visited the new station in those early days, remarked caustically on one occasion that instead of the road being lined with an avenue of trees it was lined with an avenue of Africans and oxen!

But the work went steadily on. A start was made on the buildings, roads were built, and a topographical survey of the research area was undertaken. The first rain gauges were installed.

Then World War II intervened. The work was not considered vital for the country's war effort, and the station was closed down, and the gauges dismantled. Mike de Villiers joined the Survey Company of the South African Engineering Corps. He was away "up north" for six years.

But with the war over, he was back at his post in June 1945, with undiminished enthusiasm. The first full research programme was soon drafted, rain gauges were sited and re-established, and the first stream-gauging weirs constructed.

From the start it had been realised that a road to the summit of the Little Berg, where the research catchment areas lay, was essential. This was a formidable project, for the slopes of the Little Berg are not only steep, but are surmounted by a layer of vertical sandstone often 30 m and more in height. Nowhere, in the whole length of the Natal Drakensberg, from Giant's Castle to Mont-aux-Sources, had this barrier ever been broached by a road. Although a start had been made in 1938, it was now realised that expert assistance would be required if this barrier were to be surmounted. It was eventually put out to contract, and this was secured by a Mr Monzali, an Italian road construction engineer, a lovable old gentleman who had made his money, and his fame, in fantastic road and rail constructions. These included the Gouritz River railway bridge. He was now living in retirement just outside Pietermaritzburg. Unfortunately, on Monzali's first day on the job, he overturned his truck on a steep portion of the road and broke his back, an injury from which

Mike's Pass under construction, approximately 1947

he was to suffer for the rest of his life. But he stuck gamely to his task. The first excavations were started in 1947, and the road was completed to the top by 28 May 1949.

This road, now known as Mike's Pass, is one of the most spectacular roads in the country. Ten and a half kilometres long, it climbs up over 600 m to the summit of the Little Berg, 1 830 m high, one of the highest motor roads in South Africa. For sheer magnificence and grandeur of scenery it rivals even the famous Hout Bay Drive in the Cape Peninsula.

From the end of the war Mike de Villiers had close on seven years at the station. When he left, in March 1952, most of the buildings had been completed, together with the weirs in four catchments. One catchment had been almost wholly afforested, and a meteorological station had been established at a height of 1 860 m.

From the middle of December 1951 to the middle of January 1952 U.W. Nänni had relieved De Villiers. He was now appointed as head of the station.

If it had been De Villiers' job to build the station from a physical point of view, it was Nänni's task to initiate the research investigation. This he did, and he and Mike de Villiers will always be remembered as the joint fathers of the Cathedral Peak Forest Influences Research Station. Both men built wisely and soundly.

In 1963 Nänni was transferred to the Forest Research Institute at Pretoria, but the work went steadily on. The original project was to test the effects on water supplies of afforestation, and to compare these effects with, firstly, controlled veld burning with no grazing, secondly, controlled veld burning with grazing, and finally with total protection of the indigenous vegetation. *Pinus patula*, a relatively fast-growing tree from Mexico, was selected for afforestation.

Results showed that afforestation, of exotics at any rate, had an adverse effect on stream flow.

When, in 1986, the Forestry Department was absorbed under the management control of the Natal Parks Board, all the work of the research station, which had been geared mostly towards the questions of exotic trees and afforestation, ceased to be of importance. The area was reverting to wilderness and natural conservation, and in it there was no place for plantations of exotic trees. Extensive programmes were undertaken to remove alien plants, particularly from Kamberg, where there were wattle plantations, and Solitude (now Injisuthi) and Cathedral Peak. But it is an ongoing effort as seeds from plantations going back 80 to 100 years continue to sprout and the seedlings have to be rooted out.

The question of South Africa's climate was also studied at the centre. Was the climate of South Africa changing? Was the country drying up? John Bird, writing in 1891, claimed that the rainfall had decreased since 1845, and that "the growth of grass is no longer so luxuriant nor so brightly green as it was then". And no one who reads Dobie's Journal can fail to be impressed by the long periods of continuous rain, day after day, in the 1860s, a phenomenon almost unknown today. This question is hotly debated at every farmers' congress, and at every village pub where farmers foregather after a thirsty day in the lands. Of course, every pundit has his theory. But, as in the case of the argument on whether trees dry up streams, few opinions are based on any real scientific facts. No one really knows. But opinions are legion.

Hendrik Martens, the founder of Champagne Castle Hotel, who farmed in the Cathkin area for many years, was quite emphatic that changes had occurred in his lifetime. Shortly before he died he told me that the mountains were much wetter 60 years ago than they are today. Hail was never known in the early days, and the winds today were much stronger. From his house under the shadow of Wostyn he would hear them roaring up the mountains. Snow, too, was much heavier. In those days you could sometimes scale the 20-metre vertical sandstone cliffs of the Little Berg by climbing the snow packed against them. This would be unheard of today. Martens claimed that the snow would sometimes reach right down to the Sterkspruit where the Champagne and Cathkin Park roads meet. In sheltered places at Cathkin Park Hotel the snow would lie all winter. Today a mere sprinkling of snow falls there once in 20 years. Sheep were known to be dug out alive after seven to ten days, their breath having melted a small breathing hole in the snow. Old inhabitants of the Witsieshoek area seem to confirm this. Snow was much heavier in the earlier days, they say; it lasted much longer, and often fell even in summer.

Carter Robinson, father of the Forest Reserve, confirmed all that Hendrik Martens said. He was quite certain that snow was far more frequent then than it is now in the Drakensberg. He also confirmed that hail was unknown in the early days. Old residents still talk of the Great Blizzard of 31 May 1905, when the snow stretched well down into Natal. Steenbok and birds crowded on to the farmers' verandas for shelter, and the blacks still tell of buck that came right into their huts in the storm. As a boy of five years of age I have vivid recollections of my mother telling me how trains on the main line had been snowed up, with passengers marooned, foodless, in their carriages. This never happens today.

As one pages through the early records of the Colony, especially the early Magistrates' Reports, the evidence that snowstorms in the Drakensberg were once more severe than they are today mounts up.

On 3 August 1849 a strong force of police and military, under the command of Lieutenant Milles, left Bushman's River Drift for the Cathkin area in pursuit of cattle that had been raided by Bushmen. They left in fine weather, prepared for an absence of 20 days. But on the third day of their march, while following a clear trail underneath the Drakensberg, they were overtaken by a tremendous snowstorm which compelled them to deviate from their track and seek shelter. The whole country, as far as the eye could see, was covered in snow. They described the cold as "intense" and "insupportable". They only had three tents with them, which they all shared. For three days it snowed. They were at least 50 km from their base at Bushman's River Drift. Milles suggested marching for headquarters, but James Howell, second in command, refused. His men, he said, were not clad warmly enough, and it would be death to move. Milles and two farmers with them did leave, but they were soon back. It was impossible to get through.

Next day the weather broke: it was fine, and they struck tents at daybreak, heading for home. For hours they floundered through the snow for most of the way, sometimes up to their knees, and only reached headquarters at dusk. Howell had experienced a bad snowstorm in the Sneeuberg 10 years previously, when he had lost one of his men and suffered himself for nine days from the effects of the snow. It was nothing compared to this, he said.

Another tremendous snowstorm lashed the Drakensberg in 1869. In August of that year the military were busy organising one of the most elaborate expeditions against the marauding Bushmen that had yet been mounted (described in Chapter 3). Allison was to go in with a large force up the Namahadi Pass into Lesotho, and Giles, with an equally large force, was to march from Fort Nottingham, climb the Drakensberg south of Giant's Castle, and meet Allison somewhere near the sources of the Orange River. But Giles found it impossible to move from Fort Nottingham on time. On 22 August a storm accompanied by tremendous winds, which "exceeded in severity anything hitherto experienced in this locality", burst upon them. For three days it raged. Even on the flats at Meshlynn the snow lay half a metre deep, and in places was two metres deep. A messenger who was sent to Estcourt had to struggle through snowdrifts up to his waist. For 16 days the expedition was held up, unable to move, and it was not until 7 September that they were able to march out of Fort Nottingham. These two storms are typical of many others which appear again and again in these early records. Most are far more severe than anything known today.

Another contentious subject that was studied at the Research Station was the question of grass-burning. The effects of burning on vegetation are still not fully understood, but almost all informed opinion regards it as desirable to burn the grassland on the escarpment occasionally. There is still considerable difference of opinion, however, as to when, and how frequently, fires should occur. The generally accepted view is that burning of the veld should take place only after the first spring rains, and this was incorporated in the Soil Conservation Act of 1969. But there is another school of thought which holds that occasional autumn burns, especially for forest regions, are better. Once again, the experts differ.

Even without the hand of man, fires must have occurred in the Drakensberg for many thousands of years. It is incorrect to say that fire is not a natural phenomenon. It is often caused by lightning. I have seen this myself. Twice I have seen the lightning strike high up on the face of the mountain, to be followed by the smoke of a fire. On the first occasion the fire burnt for two days across the face of Cathkin Peak. The same thing has been observed at the Cathedral Peak Forest Station. It is also known that rockfalls sometimes start fires.

We must remember, too, that grasslands that have not been burnt for some time always deteriorate. Litter accumulates, stifling the good grasses. These are replaced by inferior species, and by herbs and small shrubs. Fire is a cleansing, regenerative agent. Anyone who has seen the wealth of wild flowers in the Drakensberg after a spring burn will realise the truth of this.

But fire is also a vicious killer, and must be controlled. This was one of the main tasks of the men who staffed the forest reserves. On Tuesday, 5 August 1958, two bad fires broke out in the Cathedral Peak area, and on the same day extensive fires were reported from the Transkei, the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, and the far north of the country. For many it was a day of terror, as the raging fires swept down upon them. In the Natal Midlands they roared on for 80 km, completely out of control. At least 10 lives were lost. Two years earlier a similar fire had broken out at the Research Station at Cathedral Peak. The home of the Research Officer came within an ace of being burnt down, three African huts and the cottage of a driver went up in flames, and 485 ha of grassland were destroyed. On 17 August 1970 five forestry labourers in the Cathkin area, burning breaks only a few kilometres from our home, were trapped in a raging, runaway fire. All five men, gravely burned, had to be evacuated by helicopter, and one subsequently died in hospital.

Victims of the 17 August 1970 fire being carried to the waiting helicopter

Natal Mercury

One of the worst fire tragedies in the Drakensberg occurred in the Royal Natal National Park on 3 September 1966. That morning a woman staying at the hotel attempted to light a cigarette on the slopes of the Little Berg, above the Cascades. The grass was long and tinder-dry, and a high wind was blowing. She threw her lighted match down, thinking it was out, but it was not, and in a split second a roaring sheet of flame started to race up the mountainside.

Down at the Parks Board office, 3 km away, the warden, Jock Fraser, was sitting at his desk. He looked up, saw the smoke, and dashed immediately for the compound, where he quickly rounded up a team of six game guards. Together they raced for the hill slopes. It was quite impossible to extinguish the fire, but they managed to put in a back burn and so save the camp site, the fisheries office, and a staff house. Then, after watching the fire carefully to see in which direction the wind was consistently blowing, they raced up the hillside in an attempt to put in a break ahead of the advancing fire. But suddenly the wind changed, and the fire swept down upon them.

In one leap it cleared a gap of 100 m. The flames were 15 m high. Ahead of the seven men was a single high rock, and the warden realised it was their only hope. Towards it the men raced, but one man panicked, and, ignoring Jock Fraser's shouts, ran in the wrong direction and was swallowed up in the flames. The other five, together with Fraser, reached the rock at the same time as the fire. They leapt on to it and started to scramble to the top. Three of the game guards managed to reach the summit, and promptly lay down flat, but with the flames all around them two of them again panicked. One jumped off the rock. The warden leapt down after him, and, fighting desperately for his own life and the life of the man he held, managed to hold down the fear-crazed, panic-stricken man while the flames swept over them. The three men who lay down flat on top of the rock without moving escaped almost unscathed, in spite of the searing heat, but the other three, Jock Fraser

The alarm has sounded, and a helicopter ferries a team of fire fighters into the deep recesses of the Drakensberg Natal Mercury

and the two young men who panicked, were gravely burnt with third degree burns.

When they were able to descend they started to look for the first man who had panicked. They found him. He was dead. So fierce had been the heat of the flames that only five paces separated the point where the fire caught him to where he fell.

Eventually the rest of the party staggered back home, and three of them, including the warden, were rushed off to Ladysmith Hospital, where they spent many months in agony, undergoing a series of skin grafts.

But the fierce hunger of the fire had still not been appeased. Up the slopes it tore, and round the corner to Thendele, the hutted camp run by the Natal Parks Board. On its way it caught a game ranger, swept over him, and left him a smouldering, charred trunk. At Thendele a large group of campers were out walking on the hillside, but mercifully, at the last moment, the wind swung round and the fire passed them by.

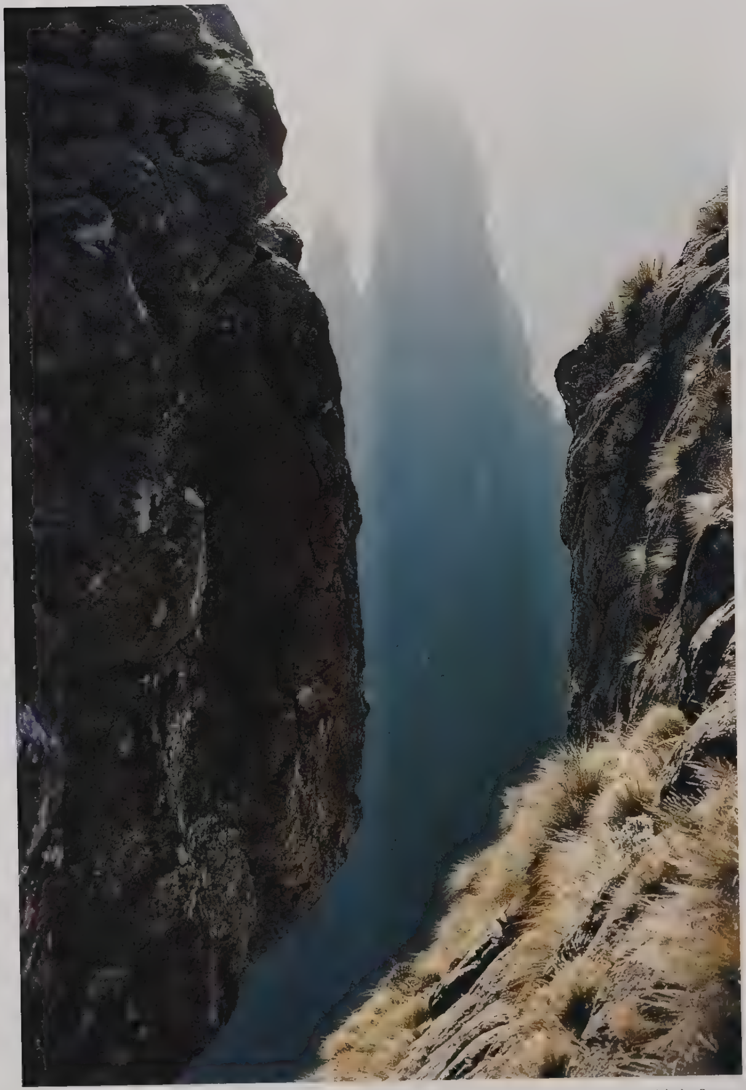
And the tally? Two dead and six burnt, three of them seriously. The warden paid in full for his gallant act in saving at least one man, for he never fully recovered. And all because of one carelessly dropped match!

What should you do if you are caught in a runaway fire such as the one I have just described?

If you have no obvious means of escape, ignite the veld. It will burn away from you rapidly. Its windward front will move slowly. Step across this slow fire, and follow behind the hot front. By the time the fire approaching you joins your own fire, you will be safe in your own burnt veld. If you have no time for this, or have no matches, run into the advancing flames, not away from them. By doing this you reduce the time your body is in contact with the flames. Then, when you are through, *roll*. Your clothing will almost certainly be on fire, and rolling is the best method of putting the flames out. If for any reason you cannot do even this, your only hope is to lie flat on the ground, and let the flames sweep over you. By doing this you reduce the area of your body which will be in contact with the flames, and of course heat always rises. Never, under any circumstances, run away from a fire unless you are sure you can outpace it.

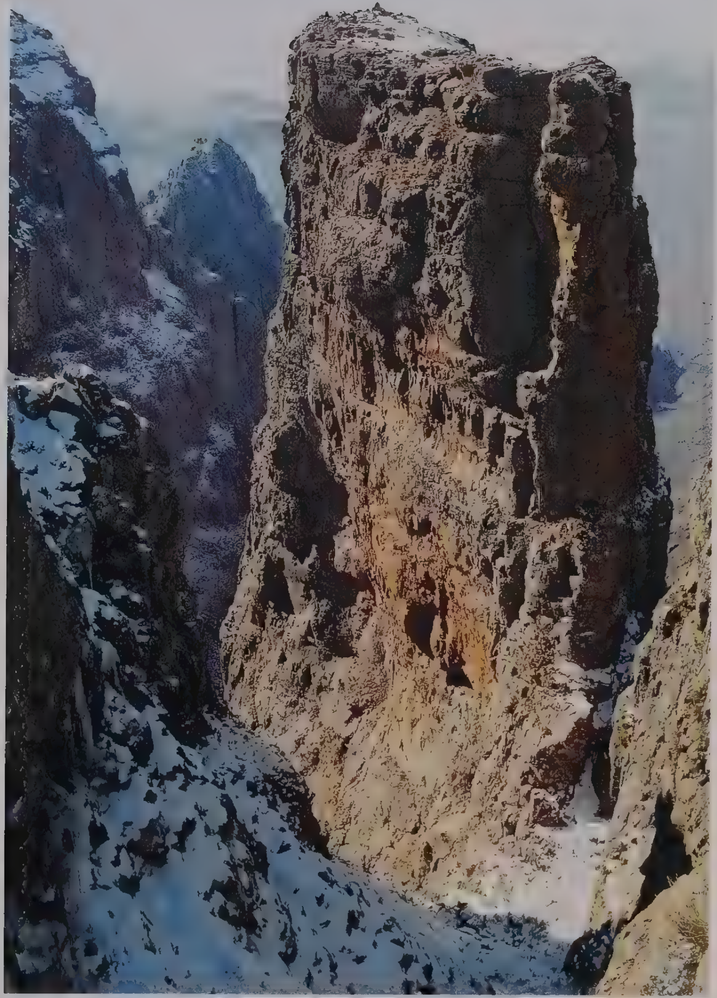
* * *

Can we not keep one small corner of God's earth free from the abrasive profit motive, free from the searching, uprooting, despoiling hand of man, free in all its untouched pristine beauty and grandeur? Let Rosalind have her Forest of Arden. Let her wander footloose and fancy-free, hand in hand with her Orlando, under the whispering trees. But in heaven's name, let it be a natural, indigenous forest, and not a forest made by the hand of man. Fortunately this controversy was finally and definitely resolved through the proclamation in 1973 of large areas of the Drakensberg as Wilderness Areas. In Wilderness Areas there is to be no sign whatever of the hand of man. Plantations of exotics are incompatible with this principle, and are therefore forbidden. The threat of exotic plantations in the Drakensberg finally disappeared forever with the proclamation in 2000 of the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site.



Malcolm Pearse

The Column... a daunting spire from which many a brave-hearted mountaineer turned away, until George Thomson, climbing alone, conquered it in December 1945



Malcolm Pearse

Ifidi, North Pinnacle... looking for all the world like the ruin
of some ancient castle wall, first climbed by Martin Winter and Malcolm Moor in 1959

CHAPTER 20

SMOKE ON THE PASS - I

That was the day of the smoke on the Pass.
Witness Mahoiza, at the trial of Langalibalele,
January 1874

It was only a minor skirmish in the long story of Britain's colonial wars, but before the dust of the conflict had finally settled, a popular Lieutenant Governor had been recalled with his career in ruins, Natal's system of native administration under Sir Theophilus Shepstone had been shaken to its foundations, the movement towards Responsible Government in Natal had been set back 20 years, and a gifted and saintly priest, once the most loved man in Natal, had become overnight, in the words of the *Natal Witness*, the most unpopular man in the Colony. And on the summit of a lonely pass in the Drakensberg men had fought and died in the smoke of battle.

His name was Langalibalele. The irreverent British Tommies called him "Old Longbelly", while *Punch* added his own inimitable contribution:

Some men may praise and some denounce you,
But tell me, how shall I pronounce you?
There's something of a southern sea
In soft Lan-gali-ba-le-lee[1].

Ten years before he hit the world's headlines, in 1863, John Shedden Dobie, the traveller, had visited him and had described him as "a big pudding-headed-looking beast, as like a king as any lout of a porter". But nine years prior to this Bishop Colenso had described him as "In appearance rather a young man, of perhaps 26 years [actually he was nearer 36], tall, and in good condition — you would hardly call him stout — with that dignity and grace in his actions which so commonly, amidst the most savage nations, proclaim the King. What had happened in the nine years? Was this yet another example of the bitter prejudice and partisanship which bedevilled the whole affair from its very start? Or was it, perhaps, that nine years of *utshwala, intombis* (Langalibalele admitted to Bishop Colenso that he had 80 wives!) and *"jabula-ing"*[2] (wine, women and song!) had taken their inevitable toll? Whatever it was, Langalibalele certainly aroused the most heated emotions, and a controversy the echoes of which have, even now, hardly died down.

Langalibalele was born round about 1818, the son of Mtimkulu, chief of the amaHlubi tribe, who had been slaughtered in the year of Langalibalele's birth by the marauding Matiwane. He was first named Mthethwa, after Dingiswayo, and then later Langalibalele. The name means "The sun is boiling hot" (*ilanga*: the sun; *libalele*: it is killing, or hot). Among his many other claims to fame, he was a noted rainmaker, and his services in this direction were in constant demand. There is a legend that when John Ross, the 14-year-old boy hero, called at uShaka's kraal in 1827 on his 960 km journey to Delagoa Bay, uShaka gave him an escort of 30 warriors under the command of Langalibalele, but this can hardly be correct, for Langalibalele himself would only have been a boy of nine at the time.

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[1] The correct pronunciation is Langa-lee-ba-lé-le, with the main accent on the penultimate syllable, rhyming with "fair".

[2] *uTshwala*: beer; *intombi*: girl; *jabula*: to rejoice (Zulu).

By 1848 he had become chief of the amaHlubi tribe in their ancestral home on the left bank of the Buffalo River. The amaHlubi, of course, had fared badly over the years. It will be remembered that Matiwane had fallen upon them 30 years before, and had broken them up. Some had fled to the Free State, some to the Cape, some to Lesotho, and some into the Drakensberg. These had later been driven out by Matiwane. Many of those who fled into Lesotho settled under a Chief Molapo, whom we shall meet again. A small remnant had remained behind in Zululand under Langalibalele. By this time they had been reduced in number to about 7 000 men, women and children.

In 1848 further trouble arose for them. In that year Mpande, King of the Zulus, summoned Langalibalele to appear at the royal kraal. Langalibalele refused to come, exhibiting thus at an early age the recalcitrance that was later to result in his complete undoing. He alleged that he was afraid to come, as on a previous occasion his brother, Dhloma, had been murdered when summoned by Dingane to appear before him. Coming events were casting their shadows before! Mpande, in his wrath, fell upon him, and Langalibalele, together with the neighbouring tribe of Putini (Putini was his uncle, and the two tribes were interrelated) fled across the Buffalo into Klip River County (the Ladysmith district), where they appealed to the Lieutenant Governor, Martin West, for help. The Government decided to move the two tribes down into the Midlands of Natal. Once again, Langalibalele exhibited the same stubbornness he had already shown, and refused to move, and it was only the skill and diplomacy of Shepstone, who was sent up specially to handle the matter, that finally convinced the chief to move without bloodshed. In April 1849 the amaHlubi were established on the banks of the Bushman's River, just north of Giant's Castle, in 36 450 ha of good arable country, while Putini and his tribe were similarly established due north of the amaHlubi, along the banks of the Little uThukela. Part of the idea of the Natal Government was that these two tribes would act as a buffer between the marauding Bushmen in the mountains and the settlers.

Here, in their mountain fastnesses, under the shadow of the mighty Drakensberg, the two tribes prospered and grew, their very isolation tending to increase their spirit of independence. By this time Putini was an old man, with "a soft, wily eye and a slow, drawling utterance", according to Bishop Colenso who visited him in 1854. He also described him as "weak and childish", since he asked the good Bishop if he did not have a medicine for old age! But Langalibalele was young and in his prime, still in his early thirties, and on his mountain slopes, sunwashed in summer but grim and forbidding in the days of winter, he brooded darkly. By the time our story opens, his tribe had grown to 94 000.

Langalibalele at the time of his trial in 1874

Even before the "rebellion" he was regarded by those in authority as a *mauvais sujet.* In 1869 new marriage regulations had been promulgated, and Langalibalele's tribe resisted these. The tribe was fined and warned of the consequences of any further trouble. Then came the series of events that precipitated the final catastrophe.

In 1870 diamonds had been discovered at Kimberley, in Griqualand West, and soon the great diamond rush was on. It soon became the practice for the diggers to pay their black labour in the form of guns. In the Cape this was not illegal. Any black could purchase a firearm merely on production of a note from his employer, but in Natal this was not so. Here, no gun could be acquired without registration and a permit from the Lieutenant

Diamond diggings in Kimberley, 1874

Governor. Langalibalele saw his chance. He made sure that his young men working at the diggings chose their payment in the form of guns instead of cash, and he persuaded Putini's people to do the same. Arrived home, his men refused to hand the guns in for registration.

Early in 1873 John Macfarlane, the Magistrate at Estcourt, ordered Langalibalele to hand in all guns in the possession of his tribe for registration. Langalibalele at first hedged. He did not know the names of those who had firearms, what guns they had, nor where they were kept. At length he bluntly refused. After several further attempts to induce him to comply, Macfarlane eventually told him that "as the vessel in which he kept his offences was full to overflowing", he had reported him to Shepstone, the Secretary for Native Affairs.

In April a message was despatched to Langalibalele by the Government summoning him to appear in Pietermaritzburg to give an account of himself. Langalibalele promised the messenger that he would come, but he did not keep his promise. Instead he sent Mabuhle, his head induna, or chief, to say that he could not come because of an old wound in his leg. The Secretary for Native Affairs replied that the matter was urgent, and that it was imperative that he come down, if necessary by oxwagon. The messenger was treated with disrespect, and was sent back with a message that Langalibalele was too ill to come.

Then occurred an unfortunate delay. Cetshwayo, the new Zulu king, was due to be crowned, and Shepstone, with an imposing entourage, left on 31 July for the Royal Kraal. He returned only on 16 September.

In the meantime, Langalibalele had not been idle. He went right ahead with his plans for open rebellion. Even before Shepstone left for Zululand, Colonel Griffith, the Governor's Agent in Lesotho, had informed the Cape Government of the arrival among the Basotho, at Molapo's kraal, of messengers from Langalibalele inquiring whether Molapo would be prepared to offer a safe refuge in his territory for Langalibalele's cattle and his women and children, in the event of open hostilities. The Cape Government immediately passed this information on to Natal. Actually, Langalibalele had numerous relatives in various parts of the country. He was reputed to have 54 sons and 68 daughters (we have already noted his 80 wives!). He had relatives in Lesotho, Griqualand East, where his brother was a chief, Swaziland, Zululand, from among the Fingoes, who were in large part amaHlubis themselves, and as far afield as the Caledon and Fish rivers. Many of these pledged themselves to help him. Messages and gifts were exchanged with Cetshwayo. Langalibalele's regiments were drilled and prepared for battle, many of the troops being sprinkled with *intelezi* to protect them from the bullets of the white man. Food was prepared and stored in caves in the mountains, gunpowder was manufactured, and the cattle all sent into the Upper Injisuthi area (Little uThukela) where it was, at first, planned to defend them. (Later the chief decided to take the cattle with him into Lesotho.)

Soon after Shepstone's return, on 4 October, a third deputation was sent to Langalibalele. It was decided to add weight to the deputation by sending Mahoiza and Unyembe, two indunas attached to the magistrate at Pietermaritzburg, as messengers. They carried with them a final ultimatum. The messengers were treated with complete disrespect, and even insulted. They had arrived at the chief's kraal, Pangweni, on 11 October. They were kept waiting 14 days, and only then, at another kraal, 16 km from Pangweni, they were granted audience. Before being brought into the chief's presence they were subjected to the indignity of being stripped naked. Langalibalele's answer was yet another blunt refusal to go to Pietermaritzburg. This was open defiance. The cup of his offences was indeed full! It was war.

At his subsequent trial Langalibalele alleged that his repeated refusals were motivated by fear. He quoted in his defence what has become known as the Matyana affair. Apparently 16 years earlier John Shepstone, brother of the Secretary of Native Affairs, had been ordered by the Ladysmith Magistrate to effect the arrest of Matyana on a charge of murder. Matyana arranged to be always surrounded by armed men, but eventually he was induced to come to an indaba (council or meeting) unarmed, the arms of his men being piled some 200 m away. John Shepstone is alleged to have concealed a gun under the mat at his feet, and then to have drawn it and fired at Matyana. He had missed Matyana, but had wounded a man sitting next to him. In the turmoil which had followed 30 of Matyana's men had been killed. Langalibalele had been present at the action. W.R. Guest, who has made a detailed study of the Langalibalele "Rebellion", holds that the Matyana affair of 1857 was the key to the whole Langalibalele affair of 1873.

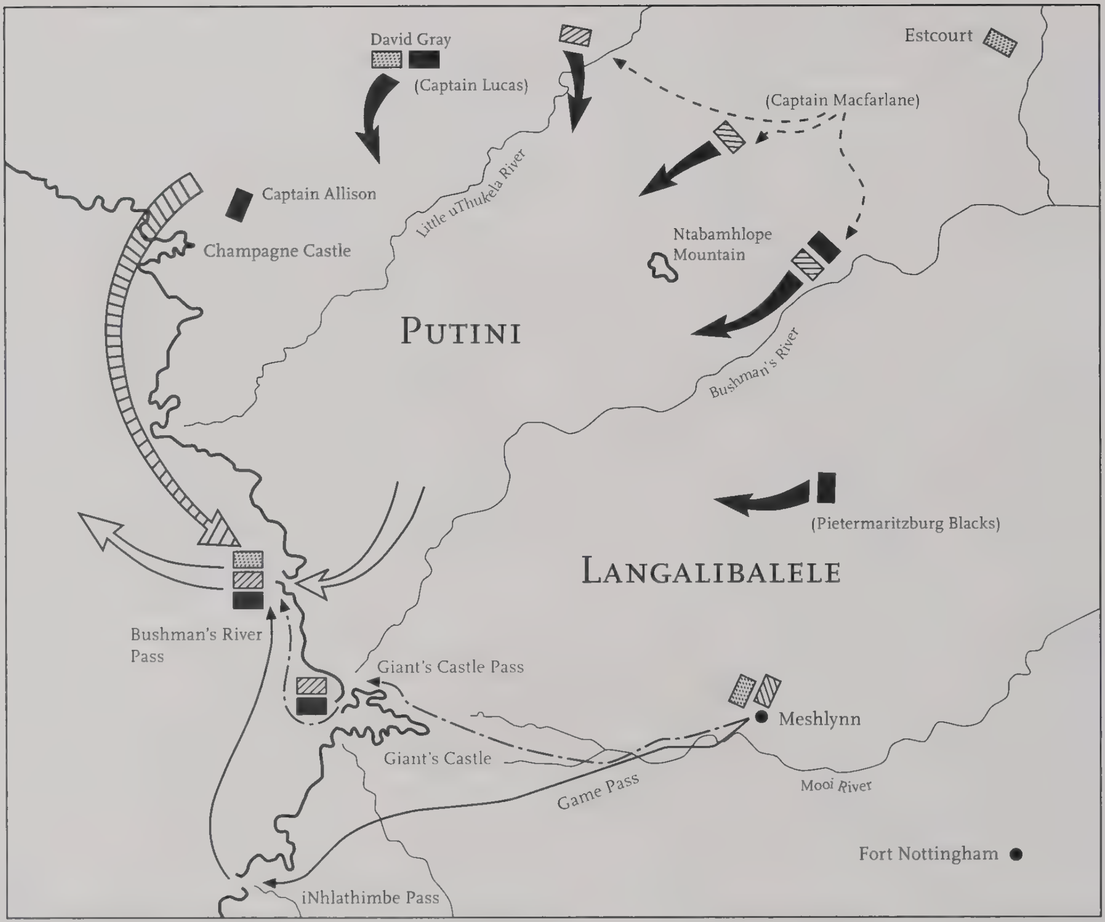
It was time to act. So far a series of unforeseen events had precluded any direct action — Shepstone's absence in Zululand, and the fact that there had been no Lieutenant Governor in Natal from the departure of Sir Anthony Musgrave early in 1873 to Pine's arrival the following July, a delay which undoubtedly had its effect in encouraging Langalibalele. Pine admitted as much in his despatch of 13 November 1873 to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, when he said that part of the cause of the disaster was that energetic steps had not been taken 12 months earlier. Now the Government could no longer allow open defiance such as Langalibalele's to go unpunished. The whole of Zululand knew of his defiance, and all were watching to see what action the Government would take. To make matters worse, the Government now received information that Langalibalele was preparing to flee the Colony into Lesotho, via the Bushman's River Pass, with all his tribe and his cattle. This they could never allow. Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of the Cape, and High Commissioner of Lesotho, to whom Pine was accountable, would inevitably require an explanation, and this could lead to a probing of Shepstone's jealously guarded native policy in Natal. It was decided to seal the passes over the Drakensberg, to apprehend Langalibalele, and to bring him to trial.

It was high time. On Wednesday, 29 October 1873, instructions were issued to the Natal Frontier Guard at Ladysmith, the Weenen Yeomanry Cavalry, the Weenen Burgher Force, the Karkloof Carbineers, the Natal Carbineers, Pietermaritzburg, and the Richmond Rifles, all volunteer regiments, to report for active service. The magistrates at Ladysmith, Weenen, and Richmond, and the Border Agent at Oliviershoek, also received instructions to call out a large black armed force. Behind these were the military.

By this time alarm and near panic had spread rapidly throughout the Colony. In order to assess clearly the events that followed, it is necessary to understand the situation in which Natal found herself, in that year of 1873. Memories of the Boer massacres of 35 years ago were still vivid in the minds of men. Poorly garrisoned by Imperial troops, Natal felt completely isolated from her nearest help, the Cape, 1 500 km away. The only forces she could rely upon, apart from the pitifully small garrisons of regular soldiers, were a few volunteer regiments, as yet untried and inexperienced. With a population of only about 16 000 whites, thinly spread, she faced the growing might of 300 000 Zulus. There was clear evidence of collusion between Natal blacks and Moshoeshoe's successor in Lesotho, Letsie. With this, and Langalibalele's numerous contacts in other parts of the country, a general uprising in which the whole country would go up in flames was an ever-present eventuality. All farming operations in the Midlands were suspended, women and children were sent into laagers in Pietermaritzburg and Mooi River, and two public meetings were held in Estcourt to discuss the defence of the town. Many Boer families trekked over into the Free State. The Government's decision to act swiftly and decisively was widely welcomed.

The plan of operations decided upon was originally proposed by Macfarlane, the Resident Magistrate at Estcourt, a colourful character who played a notable part in the development of the Natal Midlands. Macfarlane handed his plan over to the military authorities, and there it was finally knocked into shape by Lieutenant Colonel T. Milles, Commandant Natal, who in turn submitted it to the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Benjamin Pine.

Although designed as a police action rather than a military one, it was based on sound military tactics, and on paper at any rate was a good one. Its purpose was to prevent the escape of Langalibalele into Lesotho across the Drakensberg, and to effect his capture with the minimum loss of life. It failed because it was based on faulty and inadequate military maps (mainly the one produced 10 years earlier by Major Grantham), and by a complete lack of knowledge of the terrain. It is hard to understand this latter point, because although maps at the time certainly left much to be desired, there were a few men, especially hunters, who had a good working knowledge of the area. They do not


David Gray
(Captain Lucas)
Estcourt
(Captain Macfarlane)
Captain Allison
Champagne Castle
Little uThukela River
Ntabamhlope Mountain
PUTINI
Bushman's River
(Pietermaritzburg Blacks)
LANGALIBALELE
Bushman's River Pass
Giant's Castle Pass
Meshlynn
Giant's Castle
Game Pass
Mooi River
Fort Nottingham
iNhlathimbe Pass

Langalibalele Rebellion

Plan of operations

Based on map enclosed in Sir Benjamin Pine's despatch of 13.11.1873 to Earl of Kimberley

0 5 10 15

Kilometres

▩ Regulars

▨ Volunteer Regiments

■ Black Levies

➡ Government forces

⇨ Langalibalele

⇨ Allison's intended route

-·-·→ Route as planned for Carbineers

——→ Actual route taken by Carbineers

appear to have been consulted.

The map (see opposite page) will make the whole plan of operations clear. Briefly, it envisaged, first of all, throwing a wide cordon of troops, stretching from Champagne Castle to Giant's Castle, around the two locations, hemming them in from the rest of Natal, and secondly, sending two flying columns to converge along the summit of the Drakensberg on Bushman's River Pass, thus sealing the tribe off from Lesotho. The following troop dispositions were to be made:

- Captain Allison, with 500 armed blacks, was to seize Champagne Castle Pass before 5 am on Monday, 3 November 1873, and to communicate with the detachment converging on Bushman's River Pass from the south, which would be on his right, and with Captain Lucas's party on his left. He was to watch any possible approach up the mountains between Champagne Castle and Bushman's River Pass. Captain Allison, an ex-Carbineer, was the Border Agent at Oliviershoek, near the present Royal Natal National Park.
- Captain Charles Barter, with one troop of Karkloof and half a troop of Pietermaritzburg Carbineers, was to advance up Giant's Castle Pass (the first pass immediately north or to the right of the Giant), leaving the half troop of Pietermaritzburg Carbineers at its head so as to protect his rear, and then to proceed north along the summit with the Karkloof troop to the head of the Bushman's River Pass (the pass today known as Langalibalele Pass — a few kilometres north of Giant's Pass). He was to be in position by 6 am on Monday, 3 November, hold the pass, and was to communicate with Allison's party to the north, which would be on his left. The men were to carry provisions for 24 hours.

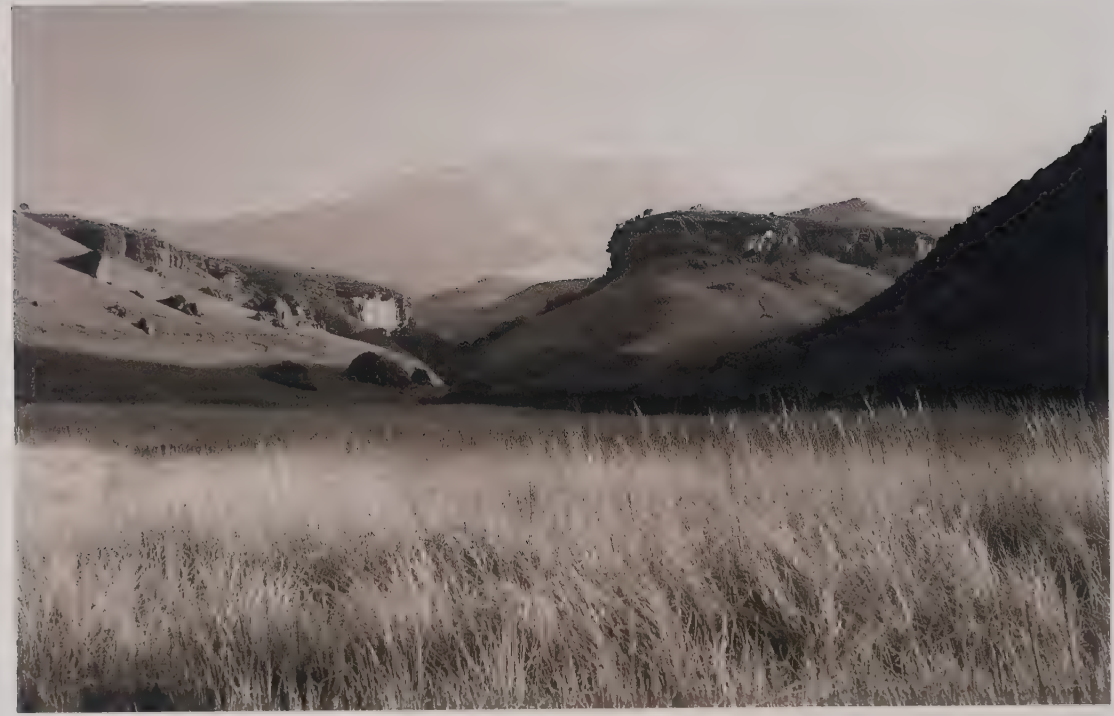
  Barter was the son of an Oxfordshire rector and a Fellow of New College, Oxford. He had first emigrated to Canada, where he had tried lumbering, and had not liked it, had returned to England, and then had come out to Natal on the *Globe*. In Natal he did well. He became a farmer, horse-breeder, magistrate, Member of the Legislative Assembly, author (he wrote *The Dorp and the Veld* in 1852, and several subsequent works), and newspaper editor (he was editor of the Times of Natal). He was greatly beloved and respected, and did much for the infant Colony. He was a keen Carbineer, and his account of the Langalibalele affair is one of the best we have.
- Captain Lucas, with 500 armed blacks, supported by the Frontier Guards, was to be posted at David Gray's farm, Cathkin. He was to be in position by 8 am on 3 November, his right at the foot of Champagne Castle Pass, his left on the Little uThukela, "feeling the right of Captain Macfarlane's party". Lucas was the Resident Magistrate at Ladysmith, and, as we have seen, had been a survivor from the wreck of the *Birkenhead*.
- Captain Macfarlane with 500 blacks, supported by the Weenen Yeomanry and the Weenen Burghers, was to be posted with his right feeling the left of Captain Lucas's party, and his left on the left bank of the Bushman's River, near iNtaba'mhlophe. He was to be in position by 8 am on 3 November, and to communicate with the Pietermaritzburg blacks on his left.
- A contingent of Pietermaritzburg blacks was to be posted with their right on the right bank of the Bushman's River, in communication with Captain Macfarlane's left, their own left resting on the Giant's Castle Pass. Again, they were to be in position on 3 November.
- Her Majesty's troops, together with half a troop of Pietermaritzburg Carbineers, were to remain at Meshlynn farm in support of Captain Barter at either Giant's Castle Pass or Bushman's River Pass, as might be required.

  In addition to the above, Captain Arthur C. Hawkins, Resident Magistrate of the Upper Umkomanzi Division (Richmond) was to take command of the Richmond Mounted Rifles and a force of 500 blacks, and to occupy the country to the south of Giant's Castle, between the emKhomazi and the enZimkhulu rivers, so as to prevent any escape in that direction.

Tactically, and on paper, the plan was a good one. In practice it was quite unrealistic. It failed to take account of the nature of the country. The whole area is not only large, but is so broken by great hills and valleys that communication between the various commanders in the field would have been difficult, if not quite impossible.

Altogether 200 British troops, 300 Natal Volunteers and about 6 000 blacks were involved. The spearhead of the whole operation was obviously the thrust by the Carbineers to occupy the head of the Bushman's River Pass.

On Thursday, 30 October, the troops moved out of Pietermaritzburg and commenced the long haul up the Town Hill. They consisted of about 150 men of the 75th Regiment, the Corps of Royal Artillery with their

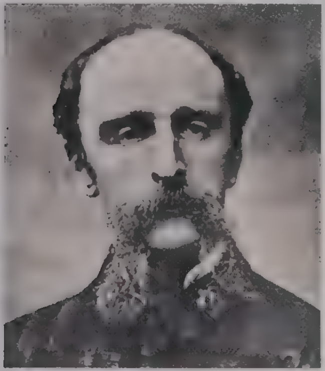


John Hone

Giant’s Castle

The soft winter sunlight models the hills and mountains in the Giant’s Castle Game Reserve. Main Cave, home to the Bushman “museum”, is in the sandstone cliff on the hill in the middle distance, with the imposing bulk of Giant’s Castle (3 314 m) in the background two guns, and the Natal Carbineers. They reached the rendezvous, Fort Nottingham, on the Saturday afternoon.

Fort Nottingham, today, is a tiny little hamlet, just off the road from the Dargle to the village of Nottingham Road, nestling under placid, age-old oaks. It had been established in 1850 as a military post to check Bushman raids and for several periods had been almost abandoned. Seldom, if ever, had it seen such busy times as these first few days of November 1873.


Major A.W. Durnford (1830-1879)

Lieutenant Colonel Milles, Commandant Natal, made a point of being there on Sunday, 2 November, to ensure that all was in order. In his evidence at the subsequent military enquiry, he said that he had not been altogether happy at the idea of Captain Barter, who was not a professional soldier, being in command of the Bushman's River Pass party. At that point Major Durnford, R.E., a professional soldier and Milles' Chief of Staff, volunteered to command the party, and this offer Milles gratefully accepted. Volunteer Law permitted a regular soldier not under the rank of Captain to be in command of a volunteer regiment. This superseding of Barter at the last moment sowed the seeds of the subsequent ill-feeling between the two men, which played no small part in the subsequent course of events.

Durnford was a Royal Engineer, Chief of Staff to Commandant Milles, a man of experience and undoubted courage. We shall subsequently have to consider how he shaped up to the strains of command. He was born in Ireland in 1830, and after service in India and Gibraltar, had arrived in South Africa in 1872, being posted to King William's Town. At the end of May 1873, only five short months before he was caught up in the Langalibalele affair, he was sent to Natal. He was a tall, spare man, with steady, observant eyes, a balding head, and a magnificent moustache which dangled down to his collarbones. He was ascetic and reserved, and J.A. Froude, the historian, who knew him, thought highly of him, but Sir Garnet Wolseley, Pine's successor, could not stand him. "I wish I could get rid of him," he wrote. One important point affecting his future actions must be noted here. On assuming command, the Lieutenant Governor, Sir Benjamin Pine, told him personally that on no account were the British troops to fire the first shot.

Sir Benjamin Chilley Campbell Pine had only recently arrived in Natal, in July 1873, but he was not new to the country. In fact, this was his second term as Lieutenant Governor. His first term had lasted from the end of 1849 to 1855. He returned as Sir Benjamin in July 1873. A man of considerable ability, he had held high office as Acting Governor in Sierra Leone, with great distinction. He was energetic and independent, with ideas of his own, although inclined to be a little impulsive. Some of his actions were certainly somewhat indiscreet. David Dale Buchanan, controversial editor of the *Natal Witness*, clashed violently with him, and although during his first term of office he got on well with Shepstone, a coolness developed between them after the Langalibalele affair, possibly because Shepstone, now 20 years older, had by then developed a mind of his own. Pine was essentially a man of action. During his first term of office he happened to be at Bushman's River Drift (the present Estcourt) at the moment when a punitive expedition was about to set out in pursuit of a gang of raiding Bushmen. He insisted on taking personal command of the expedition himself. Now true to nature, he did the same again, and decided to take the field himself. Although not in the best of health at the time, he set out from Pietermaritzburg for the front at 2 pm on the Friday, together with his private secretary, Sir William Beaumont, and Sir Theophilus Shepstone, who was a brilliant administrator, but cold, withdrawn, an autocrat, and decidedly self-opinionated. Pine was later censured for this action of his by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, who told him he should have remained at his post in Pietermaritzburg. He was also censured for not having kept the Governor of the Cape, Sir Henry Barkly, fully informed of developments prior to the actual outbreak.

Fort Nottingham, nestling peacefully under pleasantly wooded hills, was a colourful scene of bustling activity on that Sunday morning of 2 November 1873. Mingling with the red coats and white helmets of the British Tommies were the blue uniforms, the white facings, and the jaunty forage caps of the Carbineers, booted and spurred, with their long side-burns and bushy beards. Quartermasters were busy checking stores, armourers were portioning out the ammunition, while non-coms. drew supplies from the hard-pressed commissariat. Over to one side the smoke curled up from the cooking fires where the cooks toiled over the great pots of skilly and stew. Men were attending to their horses, checking bridles and harness, and preparing the midday feed of good, ripe oat-hay. Others were preparing loads for the packhorses. Small groups sat around under tarpaulins, for it was a drizzly, wet day, with their pipes and tobacco, discussing the latest news, while others, wiser than most, were snatching a few minutes of quiet sleep in their tents, for the word had gone round that they were to ride through the night. Over in one corner was a group of *khehlas* (old men), with their headrings and grizzled beards, taking snuff and watching with cool indifference the doings of the white men, the *abelungu*. Busiest of all was Captain Charles Barter, Officer Commanding the Natal Carbineers. With his massive beard, more imposing even than those of the others, he looked more like a benevolent Father Christmas than a captain of Carbineers. A little way off from the main tents were the quarters of Sir Benjamin Pine.

Charles Barter

Halfway through the morning, after Divine Service taken by the Reverend Prichard, a parade was held and the men inspected by Lieutenant Colonel Milles. The contingent consisted of Major Durnford in command; two officers, Captain Barter and Sergeant Major Taylor; six non-commissioned officers; 47 troopers of the Natal and Karkloof Carbineers; 25 mounted Basotho, and Elijah Kambule, the interpreter, one of Shepstone's key men.

Then, at 7.30 pm, as the light began to drain from the fading sky, the trumpets sounded for the saddle-up, and at 8 pm the men moved out of camp to the steady clip-clop of the horses' hooves and the jingle of their harness, headed by Major Durnford, Captain Barter and the Basotho.

Their destination had been kept secret. Only Major Durnford and the handful of Basotho guides from Chief Hlubi's kraal, and possibly Charles Barter, knew to what point they were headed. Each man had been supplied with 40 rounds of ammunition and provisions for three days, but contrary to Durnford's instructions, these provisions instead of being carried by the men individually, had all been loaded on to four or five packhorses, which brought up the rear. In the darkness Major Durnford failed to realise that his orders had not been carried out.

Soon after leaving Fort Nottingham instructions were passed down the line that silence was to be maintained, but the men were allowed to ride at ease, and soon a good many pipes were going. Heavy mist blanketed the land. Each man's world consisted of the dim figure of the man in front, and the glow of his own pipe. But the spirits of the men were high, and when the order came that each man was to have two cartridges loose in his pockets, so that they could be easily got at, excitement and eager anticipation reached fever pitch.

On through the night they rode, crossing the Mooi River, and at 1 am they reached William Popham's farm, Meshlynn. Here they off-saddled and rested for two hours. And it was here that the first of the many setbacks came. Two packhorses were missing, carrying some of the ammunition and all of the provisions; and secondly, the farmer, William Popham, was away from home. They had relied on Popham putting them on the right course for Giant's Castle Pass. Now they could depend only on the Basotho guides.

Two Basotho were sent back to look for the missing packhorses, but they could not be found, and at 3 am they started up again, this time placing the remaining packhorses between the two corps of Carbineers, instead of leaving them in the rear. With scouts on either side to protect their flanks, and in a dripping mist heavier than ever, they rode up the valley of the Mooi River, with guns loaded now, and to the words of their commanding officer: "Fire slow, and fire low, if you are attacked."

Then, just as the light was breaking, they entered Game Pass, which leads up the slopes of the Little Berg to the fine, open grasslands that lie below Giant's Castle itself. The mist was breaking, too, and suddenly all the world was alight with the freshness of a dawn that only the Drakensberg knows. The spirits of the men began to rise, and, emerging at the top of the pass, and seeing the green sunlit slopes before them, they broke into a spirited canter and jogged merrily along in the morning light. They knew that this was 6 am on the morning of Monday, 3 November, but they could not know that this was the very moment they were supposed to be at the summit of the Bushman's River Pass, 25 km away and 1 250 m above them. Nor could they know that they were already on the wrong trail, and that the series of events that were to lead inexorably to the final tragedy, had already been set in train. Durnford realised the former, and was vaguely troubled: he could not know the latter.

That they were on the wrong trail was soon very evident to him, however. His military maps had shown a level plateau between Meshlynn and Giant's Castle Pass. But here, in front of him, lay mile upon mile of the most rugged terrain imaginable, rocky outcrops, steep mountain slopes, hill on distant hill, the whole intersected by a maze of deeply cut river valleys, and capped by the mighty Drakensberg, still 16 km away, and still to be scaled. And Giant's Castle was on their right, instead of on their left, as it should have been!

A hurried consultation, but their Basotho guides still assured Durnford that they would get him and his men up the Drakensberg, though by a different pass to the one originally planned, and probably at least 24 hours late[1]. There was nothing for it but to push on. A drop of rum was issued to each man, and then they set off again.

Natal Carbineers in the iNhlathimbe Pass

Urging his men to speed up, Major Durnford galloped ahead. And soon the long column of men became longer still, as the heat increased, and the ground became rougher and more broken, and some of the men, all of whom had been in the saddle now for 12 hours and more, began to drop behind with fatigue.

At midday they came out on the heights overlooking the tremendous valley of the Lotheni, 600 m below. To the weary men it seemed impossible that any horse could ever stumble down those sheer slopes, but it had to be done, it could be done, for there at the bottom was the Major, already beginning to ford the stream. By the time the last stragglers arrived at the bottom, they could see the rest of the troop, a thin, wavering line, struggling on the opposite slope, with Major Durnford still in the lead. So weary and exhausted were the men by this time, that several actually gave up at the river, six of the town troop, including Sergeant Major Taylor, finding their way back to Meshlynn from here at their own pace. The rest battled on up an almost impossible slope, dragging the horses up by sheer force when persuasion failed. Some of the remaining packhorses, heavily laden, simply failed to make it at all, and never reached the top, one being seriously hurt, if not killed. "Never before," says Sir John Robinson in *A Life-time in South Africa*, "had those mountain flanks been trodden by civilised man."

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[1] It has always been held that the Carbineers ascended the Drakensberg by the pass already decided upon by the military authorities, the Giant's Castle Pass. I doubt very much whether they did. My reasons for thus reversing the verdict of history, and taking them up a pass 10 km to the south of Giant's Castle Pass, are given in Chapter 22, "Setting the Record Straight".

Barter was one of the last up. At the top he found Erskine lying down, "miserably tired". A little way off the rest of the troop had dismounted near a small stream, attending to Durnford. A couple of men were bathing his head in the clear water. He was in a bad way. Rejecting the advice of experienced colonials to take a zigzag route up the slope, he had attempted to go straight up, in accordance with British Army traditions. The hind legs of his horse, unable to bear the strain, had given in, and he had rolled over a precipice and down the slope for some distance. A tree had broken his fall, but he had dislocated his shoulder, put out his collar-bone, injured two ribs, and his head had been cut.

Robert Henry Erskine (1846-1873)

The Natal Carbineers

Here they arranged for Lieutenant Parkinson, Sergeant Major Otto and a few of the more tired men of the town troop, to remain behind to bring up the stragglers and collect packhorses. Major Durnford also sent six of his Basotho scouts to climb the Drakensberg and to proceed to the Bushman's River Pass to report on the situation at the pass. The rest, reduced now to 32 rank and file and about 18 Basotho, pressed on at 2 pm.

Then came the crossing of the iBohle River, a comparatively easy descent into the ravine at the bottom, but another terrible climb out on the other side, enough, said Sergeant A.R. Button later, to appal the stoutest heart. Slipping, struggling, gasping for breath, lying down exhausted every few yards in the grass, they eventually reached the top. It was here that Captain Barter nearly gave up, and it was only the help and encouragement of his men that kept him going[1].

Now at last they came in sight of the main pass which was to take them to the summit. Rounding a corner of one of the spurs of the Drakensberg, they entered upon a scene savage in the extreme. It was a huge amphitheatre of sheer cliffs and towering pinnacles, down which hung ribbons of water, "the very birthplace and nursery of rivers" as Barter described it. Dripping moss and hanging grass and the innumerable waterfalls in the black chasms "gave a sombre and malignant aspect to the scene". To the left, full in view, lay the pass they were to ascend.

By now dusk was coming on. They were already 12 hours late for the rendezvous at Bushman's River Pass, still 23 km away, and they still had the mighty Drakensberg to climb. Durnford, utterly exhausted and faint with pain, rested here, but the men, weary though they were, tackled the climb immediately. It soon got dark, and a cutting wind howled dismally in the pass. "How we slipped and struggled," says Charles Barter, "fell, to get up, and struggle again, or lay panting on the ground, despairing of accomplishing the task, it would be tedious to tell." A few got to the top by 8 pm, but most of the men climbed the pass through the early part of the night. They had been in the saddle now for 24 hours, with no sleep and no food. The pass was a grim and forbidding place, choked with great boulders, and so steep it seemed impossible for either man or beast ever to make it. Cursing, gasping, stumbling over loose rock in the darkness, clinging to tufts of grass, the men battled to get themselves and their horses up to the 2 867 m summit of the pass in the darkness of the night. Meredyth Fannin was the first man up, followed by Andries Otto, Tom Day and T.B. Varty in that order, all Karkloof men. Some bivouacked in the pass itself, but as the night wore on men in ones and twos began to arrive at the top.

After resting a while, Durnford commenced the long climb, accompanied by Erskine and Kambule, and a few of the Basotho, but halfway up he collapsed completely. Erskine and Kambule made a bed for him on a ledge under some rocks. After a brief rest he dictated written orders for the senior Volunteer officer ahead, and then watched the sunset. Often in the years that followed he spoke of that brief hour. Far below the country spread out below him, "a frozen sea of hills", as he often described it, "glowing in the last rays of the setting summer sun". Slowly the vast panorama of hills and valleys changed from fiery red to deep purple. And slowly, inexorably, the shadows marched across those perfect hills. The wearied and exhausted man must have wondered whether he would ever see that sun again, and what the morrow held in store for him. His comrades had gone on ahead. He was alone, in a savage and unknown land, gravely hurt, and with a well-armed and unseen foe around him, who might strike at any moment. Then his tired eyes closed, and he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

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[1] In a burst of euphoria the Editor of the *Natal Witness*, in his issue of 11 November 1873, wrote: "Mr Barter says little of himself [in his account] but we can see him over every inch of the ground, well-mounted as usual, always in the front, with clear and cheery voice, putting fresh vigour and energy into the tired men, and even the jaded horses".

Those who reached the top of the pass found themselves on the lip of a shallow, saucer-like basin, several kilometres across, and stretching into Lesotho. Riding a few hundred metres over level country, they found a stream "which tasted better than any nectar could have done," said one of them. Here they off-saddled, had a drink of water, "and smoked our pipes as our dinner". None of the packhorses carrying the rations had arrived. Out of the 82 men who had set out, only 27 had made it so far.

Then Sergeant Clark came riding up with orders that they were to return to the top of the pass. Here they picketed the horses, placed guards, and tried to get what sleep they could, but so bitterly cold was it that sleep was out of the question for most of them.

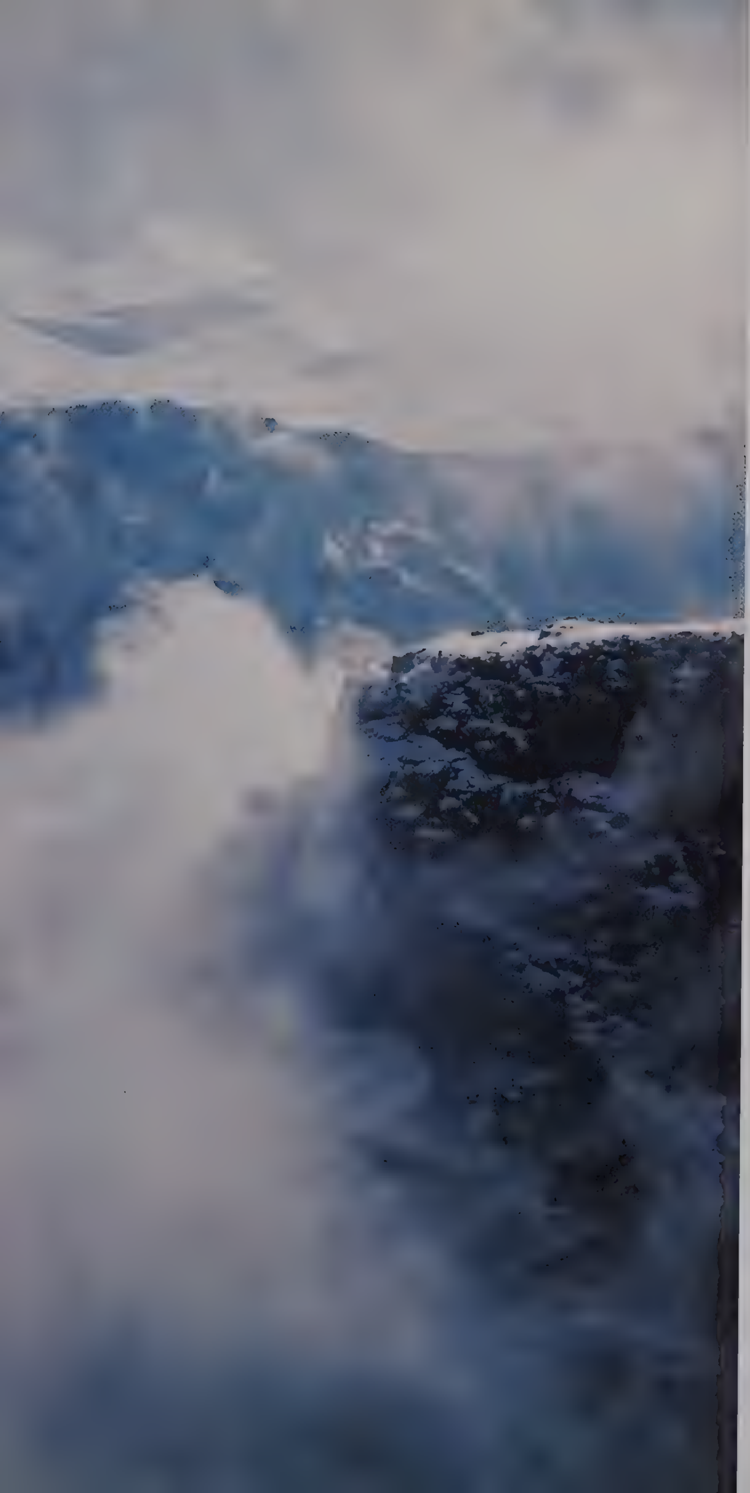
During the night young Erskine made it his job to attend to the Major. With a devotion which won the praise of all, exhausted as he was himself, he twice climbed down in the darkness with water and brandy scrounged from the men on top. Of food there was none. "He tended me as my brother might have done," said the Major later.

At 11 pm the moon rose. The rocks and the shadows in the pass stood out starkly. The weary, pain-racked man on the ledge halfway up the pass stirred in his sleep, awoke, and said immediately that he would climb to the top. How they ever got him there will always remain a mystery. The intense cold had stiffened his wounds. He climbed on foot, with a blanket passed round his body, the two Basotho in front holding on to either end, and slowly pulling forwards. Erskine and Kambule supported him from behind as best they could. Every two or three steps they had to halt and lay the wounded man down on the ground to give him a chance to rest. Nine months later he revisited the spot, and did this part of the climb in 15 minutes. This time it took him three hours.

He reached the top at 2 am, and immediately gave the order to saddle up. He would go on, he growled, even if he only had two men to accompany him. Then he sank to the ground and again fainted. He allowed himself a bare half-hour's rest, and then was lifted on to his grey Basotho horse, Chieftain, and led the advance over rough, broken country, at 2 900 m. By now 32 men had assembled at the top, and Captain Barter had also arrived, one of the last to make it.

Just before they left, one of the six Basotho scouts whom Durnford had sent on ahead from the Lotheni, returned with the news that all had been quiet at Bushman's River Pass the evening before, but that when he left some tribesmen were beginning to come up with their cattle. Durnford's only response was to urge his men on.

As they left, one or two late stragglers joined them. The force now consisted of one officer, one sergeant, 33 Carbineers carrying 40 rounds of ammunition per man, and 25 Basotho, 17 of whom had old guns, some of them muzzle-loaders. They rode in half-sections over a spongy and rocky country, due north. Fortunately the rain held off, and they rode under clear, frosty starlight, to the jingling of their horses' bits, the rough male scrape of leather against leather, and the steady clip-clop of their horses' hooves.



Upper Injisuthi

Mighty peaks hold their heads above the swirling clouds... In the centre is the Injisuthi Buttress, with (to the left) the Western Triplet, partly obscured by the Middle Triplet. The Eastern Triplet is at the right of the picture

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 21

SMOKE ON THE PASS - 2

They gave their bodies to the Commonwealth, and received,
each for his own memory, praise that will never die,
and with it, the grandest of all sepulchres.
From Pericles' Funeral Oration for the
fallen in the Peloponnesian War

Three hours later, as they approached the head of the valley leading down to the lip of the Bushman's River Pass, the dawn was just breaking. To their left lay the limitless hills and valleys of Lesotho, stretching kilometre upon kilometre into the distance. On their right was the Drakensberg escarpment, and its sheer drop of 1 225 m into the plains of Natal. High up on this lofty plateau, they looked far down on to a land of wrinkled hills, touched with the fresh glory of the rising sun. Patches of morning mist clung to the sides of the higher peaks. Now they managed to screw a canter out of their horses, and away they went, through bogs and over stones and down a steep hill to a small spruit. Here they found the five remaining Basotho scouts whom Durnford had sent on ahead.

They halted at the spruit for a brief moment, while Durnford explained that he would go on ahead with the Basotho and a few of the Carbineers, while Sergeant Button was to remain behind with the rest of the men as a support group.

Arrived at the head of the pass, Durnford surprised a few tribesmen there, whom he disarmed and forced down the pass, and then he signalled for the rest of the troop to join him. There were a few stragglers, and Barter rode to the top of a small rise from where he waved his sword for the men to come on. In five minutes all had assembled at the head of the pass. It was 6.30 am on Tuesday, 4 November 1873, instead of Monday, the 3rd.

To right and left of the pass the ground sloped upwards — on the right, as one faced the pass, gently, with broken stones and tussocks of grass; to the left, rather more steeply in a series of krantzes. Beyond, on each side, was the vast escarpment of the Drakensberg, with the pass in front leading down into the depths below. Behind them open grasslands sloped gently down in a saucer-like depression to a small stream at the bottom, the headwaters of the Lakalebalele. Beyond the stream, still further to the west, was a series of hills, rising to a height of 3 200 m.

At first it seemed to the weary and jaded Carbineers that their delay of 24 hours was not to be important. A few tribesmen hung about the high ground to the left and right of the pass, but looking down the pass they could see a seething mass of hundreds of cattle and their black drivers streaming upwards. Down at the bottom of the saucer-like depression behind them, on the banks of the stream were a few more black tribesmen with some cattle. Durnford first of all despatched six of his Basotho to these men, ordering them to return down the pass, but the Basotho soon came back saying that the tribesmen had refused, and that they had been treated with contempt. In the meantime, Durnford had drawn his men up across the lip of the pass, at one metre intervals. They were dismounted, their horses being tethered nearby.

But there was no sign of Allison and his force, which, it will be remembered, was supposed to rendezvous with them there from the north. It later transpired that the pass at Champagne Castle, up which they were supposed to go, was non-existent. Throughout the previous day, the Monday, Allison had probed right and left, and though supplied with a black guide, he had been unable to find a way to the summit.

The next most important thing was the hunger of the men, for they had been without food now for 34 hours. Durnford ordered the Basotho to kill one of the cattle grazing down near the stream, but not to use a firearm. Unfortunately five were stabbed before a cow was killed, and so ravenous were the men that some of them fell on the meat immediately, without waiting for it to be cooked, eating portions of the paunch raw. Durnford proposed paying for the beast, but this was opposed by Barter and some of the men. It was the blacks' duty, they said, to feed any Government forces in the field. Any payment would be looked upon as a sign of weakness. Durnford deferred to this, but Dunbar Moodie, later Resident Magistrate at Ladysmith, said afterwards that nothing could have been more calculated to rouse the fury of Langalibalele's men than the killing of the animal.

They had just finished skinning the beast when the few tribesmen in their rear were augmented by a large party coming down from the hills to the west. Durnford immediately proposed going down to parley with these men, but they were obviously well armed and in a truculent mood, and Barter, alarmed for his safety, tried to dissuade him. Failing in this, Barter then offered to go down with him, but Durnford insisted on going alone. Taking with him only Kambule, the interpreter, he rode down the 300 m slope to the men gathered on the banks of the stream.

Here he found from 50 to 100 of Langalibalele's men, half of them armed with guns. In the background was a group of younger men, sullen, angry and menacing, fingering their assegais, but in front were several older men, obviously elders and indunas of the tribe, dignified khehlas with their ebony headrings, and with Mabuhle, Langalibalele's chief headman, in obvious command. These men immediately recognised Kambule as one of Shepstone's men. This produced a favourable reaction, and Durnford was able to start talking. Briefly and incisively he offered his terms — surrender, and a return down the pass to the location, with a promise that their lives would be spared. Otherwise, he said, he and his men would sweep them off the face of the earth. After a long consultation among themselves, Mabuhle and the indunas agreed to the terms, on condition that Durnford and his men first left the pass. To this, of course, Durnford could not agree, and they were discussing the point when there came an angry growl from the young men in the rear. One particularly aggressive man pushed his way to the front and brandished his assegai in Durnford's face. He was promptly struck down by his own head man, but others pressed forward, gesticulating fiercely, and the old man "had to lay about him vigorously with a stick amongst the disorderly youths".

Up on the higher ground, at the actual pass, Barter and his men, alarmed, watched anxiously. Some urged the Captain to ride back in support of his Chief, but he respected his Chief's wishes and refrained. He did, however, ride halfway down the depression with Trooper Bucknall, their guns at the ready, in case they should be needed. Then Mabuhle begged Durnford to leave: he could not, he said, be responsible for the behaviour of his young men, who were becoming unmanageable. Mabuhle, however, immediately afterwards sent a messenger down the pass to urge all his remaining fighting men to come up as quickly as possible.

Back to the head of the pass rode Durnford, where he found that the situation had deteriorated. Langalibalele's men were now coming up the pass, pushing past the Carbineers, openly jeering at them, brandishing their assegais and sharpening them ostentatiously on the stones. They began to take up positions behind the rocks on the right, and up on the heights to the left, and they left no doubts as to their menacing attitude.

Durnford first of all regrouped his small force. He placed the Basotho on the rising ground to his right. To his left he placed the men from Karkloof, while the Pietermaritzburg troop was held in the centre to guard the actual mouth of the pass. At his rear he placed Captain Barter with six or seven men.

Then he sat down on a nearby stone and hurriedly wrote a short despatch to Headquarters, saying that Allison had failed to turn up, and asking for reinforcements. He also wrote a note to Parkinson, who had been left behind, ordering him to send on the ammunition at any cost, together with any of the stragglers he had been able to collect, and the remaining packhorses.

But in the pass itself conditions were rapidly approaching a crisis. The troopers were trying to force the tribesmen back down the pass, riding their horses on them and holding their revolvers at their heads. The high ground above, on both sides was now occupied by a well-placed and well-armed enemy, some 200 strong, armed men were still coming up the pass, while away in the distance, on their left rear, the hard-pressed Carbineers saw another large force of blacks approaching. At first these were thought to be Allison's men, but it was soon apparent that they were a large force of Langalibalele's men who had already ascended the pass and gone down into Lesotho, but who were now returning. They were surrounded.

First Kambule, and then many of the colonials, repeatedly begged Durnford to take resolute action and to open fire, but he refused. At one stage a group of experienced Carbineers approached Captain Barter, pointing out the position, and urging him, as second in command, to reason with Durnford. Barter felt himself unable to do this.

It was at this stage that two things occurred which triggered off the final tragedy. Barter at last decided to approach Durnford. Striding up to him, he told the Major curtly that the Carbineers were mostly young men, inexperienced in battle, and could not be depended on. Many of them were already saying that they were surrounded and would be massacred.

"Do you mean to report to me officially that you cannot depend upon your men?" asked the astonished Major.

"I do," said Barter, and urged an immediate withdrawal.

Durnford immediately ordered the Corps to be drawn up in front of him, and, addressing them, said, "Gentlemen, I am sorry to inform you that your Captain tells me he cannot place confidence in you."

Barter indignantly denied this in a loud voice, but in the uproar that followed he was not heard.

And then Sergeant Clark, the regular soldier who had been appointed to stiffen the Carbineers, suddenly lost his nerve. He cried out in panic that the end had come: they had been betrayed and all were about to be murdered. (He later claimed, at the military enquiry, that he had tried to rally the men, but the evidence was too strong against him, and he was dismissed.) Military order and discipline were on the point of cracking.

Durnford had to act now, and he had to act swiftly. He rode rapidly to the head of the pass. The Carbineers were on the verge of panic. "Will no one stand by me?" he called out. "I will, Major," said Erskine. Erskine then rode out from the ranks, and addressing Durnford, said "Will you allow me, Sir, to ride down the pass with Mr Bond to show these men there is no cause to fear?" Durnford refused.

But the men had passed the point of no return, and Durnford knew it. He had no option but to sound the retreat. Resolute action at the outset would have saved the situation. It was now too late. Rapidly he called in his outlying parties and made preparations for the withdrawal. It was 9.30 am.

And high up on the cliffs to his left, Mabuhle lay crouched behind a rock, and Jantjie, son of Selile, and Maohla, son of Luhoho, their guns at the ready, their fingers itching on the trigger, staring down at the white men below. But like Durnford, they too had been ordered by their Chief on no account to fire the first shot. The time was not yet.

Then Durnford gave the order to retire. At first he had proposed retreating down the Bushman's River Pass, being the one closest at hand, but the men objected. They said it would be better to go back the way they had come.

They formed fours and set off in orderly fashion. After a few paces they began to form half-sections, and it was then, as this operation was being carried out, that Mabuhle's fingers tightened on the trigger, and Jantjie, son of Selile, chose his man and took careful aim. Some accounts say it was Mabuhle who fired the first shot, and some Jantjie, son of Selile. It is more likely to have been Mabuhle. Both men claimed to have killed their man. Whoever it was, one single shot rang out and startled the silence of those mountain solitudes. And then all hell was let loose. Horses reared and screamed, men were thrown, sporadic firing broke out from both sides of the pass, puffs of smoke appeared from behind the rocks on the high ground and drifted slowly away in the clear mountain air, and the wild roar of battle spread like an April tide over those quiet slopes. The Carbineers, in wild panic, were off, streaming pell-mell down into the depression, and turning left up a small gorge. At the first shot Kambule cried, "Ride, Sir, for your life!" and Durnford turned to see the Carbineers in full flight.

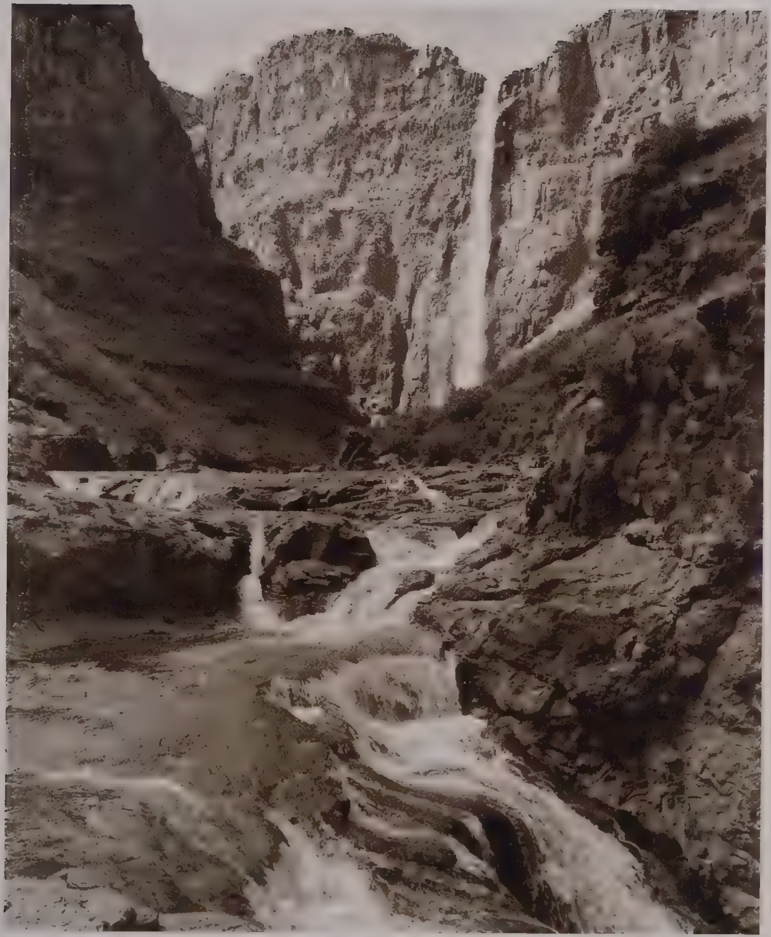
Erskine was the first to fall. His saddle girths must have been loose, for as he leapt for his horse, the saddle turned, he fell, was immediately surrounded, and stabbed to death. As his horse fell, Sergeant Button's horse leapt over it, and he was away.

Katana, one of the Basotho, was dropped as he was returning from the stream. He was dead before he reached the ground.

Varty's horse was shot under him. He pitched headlong, but as he fell, Erskine's riderless horse came galloping past. He leapt for its back, gained his seat, but two seconds later this horse also fell with an agonised scream, badly wounded. In a trice Fannin, Speirs and Bucknall were at his side. Fannin shot down one tribesman who was coming up, and then, while he helped Varty transfer the saddle from the dead horse to the Major's horse, Speirs, kneeling down, held the enemy off at 150 m until the other two had mounted. Then the three galloped away.

In the meantime, Bond had fallen, shot through the head.

Charles Davie Potterill's horse was killed under him. He raced off on foot, with three tribesmen after him. They caught him, and Latyinga,



Malcolm Pearse

Maletsunyane Falls - 193 m

This waterfall, in the mountain kingdom of Lesotho, is the second highest in Southern Africa after the uThukela Falls

Edwin Bond (1850-1873)

The Natal Carbineers

son of Tulisa, was on him in a flash. The two men grappled, but the Englishman had drawn his pistol, and Latyinga took the bullet in his guts. Before he died, however, he managed to drive his assegai deep into the Englishman's side. As Potterill fell, the other two leapt upon him, and finished him off with their assegais.

Durnford found himself completely cut off, but with Elijah Kambule at his side, the two men started to smash their way through the press. Kambule's horse went down, and as it fell Kambule himself was stabbed by an assegai. Durnford turned, leaned down, and attempted to assist the wounded man to mount behind him, but as Kambule lay an the ground, Puluzamati drew his gun and shot him through the head.

Durnford raced on, but by this time two of the tribesmen were on him. Running on each side of him, they seized Chieftain's bridle. Two assegais flashed. One pierced the Major's left arm, already helpless from the fall on the previous day, the other struck him in the side, but not deeply. Without his sword, which had been damaged in the previous day's fall, he drew his pistol and shot dead the two men at his side. Then on he galloped, only to be confronted by a man with ice-cold eyes and levelled gun.

No photograph of Charles Davie Potterill exists, but his family erected this memorial to him in the Commercial Road Cemetery, Pietermaritzburg

John Hone

But now it was time for Chieftain to take a hand. With flaring nostrils, bared teeth, ears back and a fearful scream, the beautiful animal reared up and smashed into the man, who went down under flailing hooves. Then they were through, and riding hard for open country, with Durnford firing right and left, and Kambule dead on the ground behind them. And through it all, the hoarse shouts of men caught in the lust of battle, the screams of wounded animals, the frightened rhythmic clash of spear on shield, and the still more frightening "Usuto! Usuto! Babulaleni abelungu!" ("Kill the white men!")

By now the main body of Carbineers was well beyond the curve of the hill. As soon as Durnford caught up with them he called out to Barter, "For God's sake, rally your troop!" Barter sent a messenger after his fleeing troops, but none returned. Durnford, however, was more successful with the Karkloof troop and some of the Basotho. The Basotho had behaved magnificently, many of them staying behind and covering the flight. Now they rallied, and together with some of the Karkloof men, they turned at bay and a volley from them checked the pursuit for a moment. But suddenly they saw a group of tribesmen running up the hill to their left, attempting to cut them off, and they had to abandon the position and gallop away.

Sergeant Clark was well up with the foremost men when a bullet spat into the ground at his feet and kicked up the dust, "and," says Trooper Bucknall in his account of the fight, "he never stopped again until he got to the head of the pass".

For 3 km the pursuit continued, but as the tribesmen were on foot and the Carbineers were mounted, they managed to outdistance their pursuers. Then the main body turned back, all except Hlanzi, the son of Magonzi, Umhashi, the son of Mabudaza, Zitshozi, the son of Ngatyana, and a fourth man whose name is not known. These four followed the fleeing men right to the head of the iNhlathimbe Pass.

Singing a triumphant war song, the main body returned to the Bushman's River Pass. Here a scene of wild exultation and savagery took place. The bodies of Durnford's five men who had been killed were all mutilated[1], and the men danced round them singing a war-chant. The emFihlweni Regiment was despatched northwards along the line of the Drakensberg to deal with Allison's force in case they should reach the summit. And then the quietness of the high places descended once again, with only the desolate song of the sorrowing wind to break the silence.

Durnford and his men reached the iNhlathimbe Pass at midday after a two and a half hour ride. The last of Parkinson's men, 12 of them altogether, were just reaching the top of the pass as they arrived.

And now at last the spirit of the Carbineers began to revive. Apart from Durnford's initial stand, no attempt had been made so far to check the enemy. But now Barter and most of the men proposed making a stand. Durnford, however, would not hear of it. "No!" he said, "get down off this cursed mountain as soon as you can." From now on there are clear signs that even his iron nerve was beginning to crack.

Soon after they left the top of the pass, on the way down, Parkinson, who was ahead, gave the order to off-saddle. When Durnford caught up with them, he asked angrily who had given the order, and immediately countermanded it. There was an edge to his voice.

At the bottom of the pass, just before they got to the river, Durnford assembled his men and spoke to them about retrieving their honour. He was in a highly emotional state, and was actually in tears.

Just before they crossed the river, when some form of order had been restored, they heard shots from above. It was Trooper Tainton. He had gone back for a haversack which had been left behind. Two of the four men who had pursued them had followed the troopers right into the pass, and Tainton had suddenly found himself confronted by them. He had let fly, and one of them, Zitshozi, son of Ngatyana, had pitched headlong down the krantz.

At the river, Troopers Fannin and Speirs, who knew the country well, suggested a better route home, and together they led the party down the iNhlathimbe, proceeding first through "an extraordinary tunnel", and then down a long and deep valley, and so out into open country.

Soon after they started down the valley Parkinson was again reprimanded by Durnford for halting without permission, and a few minutes later Sergeant Clark also caught it, for the same reason. Clark had stopped to rest his horse, and as Durnford rode past he shouted at him, saying that he (Clark), an old soldier, should be ashamed of himself setting such an example of mutiny. Durnford seemed to be obsessed with the danger of their being at the bottom of this steep valley, through which the iNhlathimbe flowed, with heights on each side which could be commanded by the enemy. Parkinson later resigned from the Carbineers. Although he never said anything, nor did he give this as a reason, there is no doubt that he felt keenly his humiliation in front of his men.

Finally, at 1.30 am on Wednesday morning, 5 November, jaded and weary, they reached Meshlynn. Out of 52,5 hours, 41,5 had been in the saddle.

But there never was a time when knights in armour did not have fair ladies to succour them in their hour of peril. The news of the disaster caused consternation among the girls of St Mary's College at Richmond. Many of the girls had relatives and friends among the Carbineers. At the end of study hour on the evening of the day the news broke, one of the older girls, Ada Knight (later Mrs Anderson, M.B.E.), sprang to her feet, made a short speech, and then, seizing the hat of the smallest girl, took up a collection. The girls, starry-eyed, asked that the money be used to buy pipes, tobacco, food and comforts for the "starving" Carbineers. This was done, and the goods sent off immediately by two runners recruited from the black staff of the College. They were among the first to get through to Fort Nottingham after the news of the disaster had become known. When the packages arrived, we are told, the Carbineers set up such a mighty cheer for "The Girls of St Mary's", as those wooded hills had ever heard!

But it was defeat, utter and final, a more serious defeat than the casualty list indicated. Shepstone had failed, Langalibalele's tribe had defied the Administration, killed three white men, got clean away, and Langalibalele himself had escaped into Lesotho. He had started his flight, together with his sons, on Sunday, 2 November. That night he had slept at the foot of the Bushman's River Pass, and he commenced the ascent of the pass the following morning, while the Carbineers were climbing Game Pass in the foothills, 25 km away. Riding up the lower slopes, he then dismounted and walked up the latter portion. Throughout the same day, and during the following night, the bulk of his cattle were driven up the pass. That night he slept 20 km beyond the pass, well into Lesotho. On the Tuesday, the day of the action, he pushed on another full day's journey, and is supposed only to have heard of the action at the pass on the Wednesday evening. On the other hand, there are indications that he was not far off, and that he was actually communicated with immediately prior to the action. Umyovu, one of the accused at the subsequent trial, said that Langalibalele was very near at hand at the time of the action, and he had only just left the pass when the Carbineers arrived. It is quite possible that this is correct, for his tribe as a whole would have been out to "cover" their chief, and exculpate him, as far as they could, for any possible blame for what had happened at the pass.

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[1] This was not wanton savagery. It was the belief of the Zulu and many of the allied Nguni clans that it was necessary to split the body of a fallen foe from sternum to groin to allow the spirit of the dead man to depart. Most of the slain at Isandhlwana, a few years later, were treated in this way.

What, we may well ask, were the causes of the disaster?

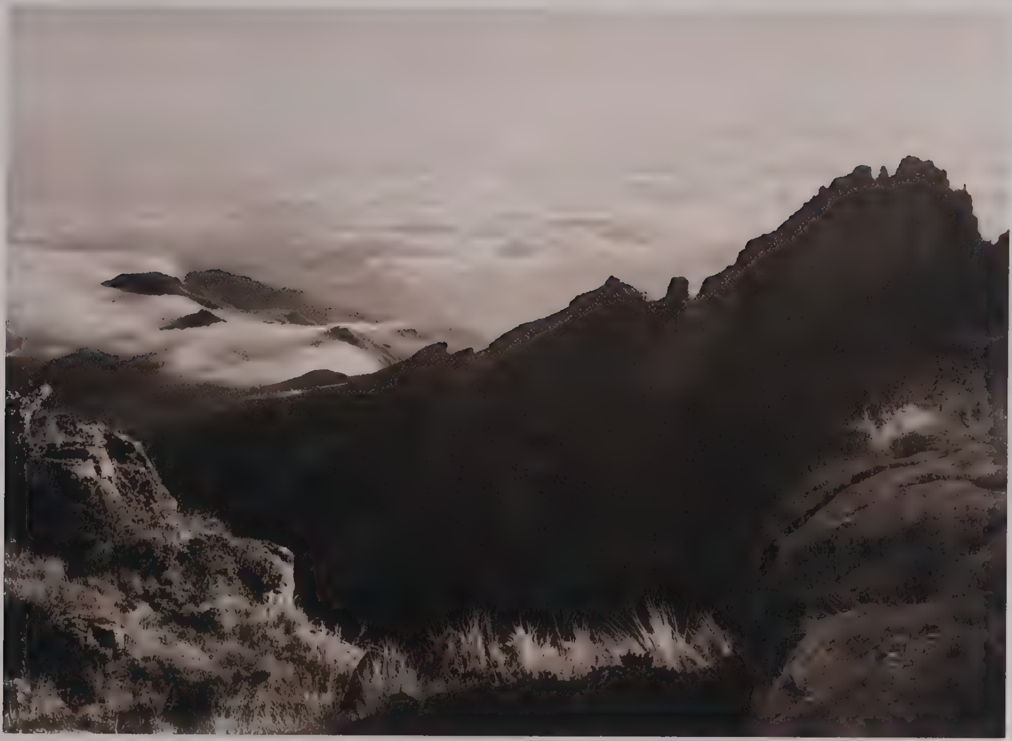
First and foremost was the lack of knowledge of the terrain, and the faultiness of the military maps available. This made the plan of action completely unrealistic. Captain Allison was unable to reach the summit, because the pass he was to use was found not even to exist. Even if he had made the summit, he could not have made contact with Durnford in the time available. It might have been possible for mounted men to proceed up Game Pass, turn right and skirt Giant's Castle with the mountain on their left, climb to the summit and reach Bushman's River Pass via the summit plateau in the time allowed (10 hours), but I rather doubt it, especially as the men would be riding through the night. And further, as we shall show later, Giant's Castle Pass is not a pass capable of being negotiated with ease by mounted men, if at all. But they took, in error, and in ignorance of the terrain, a much longer route, going kilometres out of their way, over impossible country, with the result that they arrived at their rendezvous 24 hours late. Lieutenant Colonel Milles, reporting to the Assistant Military Secretary, Cape Town, on 5 December, said that the Drakensberg was known only to a dozen men in Natal. That is probably true, but these men were available: they appear not to have been consulted. And why did the military, on that Saturday and Sunday at Fort Nottingham, make no reconnaissance of the ground to be covered by the Carbineers? It could easily have been done. It should have been done.

Secondly, we might consider the order not to fire the first shot. Here, the blame must rest squarely on the shoulders, first of all, of Sir Benjamin Pine who gave the order, but ultimately on those of Major Durnford. No one has ever questioned Durnford's personal courage. The Natal Colonist said of him, on 14 November 1873: "For cool daring and manly endurance, for humanity and every quality which can adorn an Englishman and a gentleman on the field of battle, he is one of whom his countrymen may well feel proud." But one may well ask whether he had those qualities that fit a man for command. The order not to fire the first shot had been given to him personally by Sir Benjamin Pine. Sir Benjamin should never have given him the order in the first place, and Durnford should never have accepted the command, and taken the field, with his freedom of action limited in this way. But, having accepted it, he should surely have had the moral courage to disregard it, and use his common sense, should the circumstances warrant it.

And they did warrant it. There is no doubt whatever that resolute action, even after the parley, would have resulted in a very different outcome from what eventually happened. According to Zulu custom, the superior army always fires first. The inferior army only fires in self-defence. The failure of Durnford's men not to open hostilities produced a most unfortunate impression on the men of Langalibalele. They expected action. When it did not come, they were at first mystified, and then came the jeers, and the taunts, and the laughter. The commander in the field may not have the legal right to disobey orders; but he does have a duty to use his discretion. Even Nelson, at the Battle of Copenhagen, put his telescope to his blind eye, and disobeyed orders. It was here that Durnford failed, and he was severely, and rightly, criticised for it afterwards. In the nature of things, he could not defend himself. But his report to Sir Benjamin Pine, soldierly, brief and incisive, ends with these simple words: "The orders I received were 'not to fire the first shot'. I obeyed." He may have thought that this exonerated him. It did not.

And he seemed to lack in other particulars, too. Barbara Buchanan, in Natal Memories, remarks that his refusal to accept advice from those who knew the country (remember that he had only just arrived) and his conduct at the pass "roused burning indignation throughout the Colony".

Then there is the breakdown of his own morale when they arrived back at the head of the iNhlathimbe Pass, and during their return march to Meshlynn. Granted, his endurance must have reached breaking point, but commanders in the field are not supposed to break!



Malcolm Pearse

Above the Clouds

The view from the top of Gray's Pass is all but obscured by thick cloud.
The peak on the right is Sterkhorn, with the Turret and the pyramid-shaped Amphlett's to its left

There is no doubt, too, that there was an undercurrent of hostility between the Major himself and his men throughout the whole affair. His assumption of command over the head of Captain Barter has already been noted. This may have been necessary at the time, but a more tactful man would have found ways of softening the blow, and even of winning Barter over. Instead, he made matters worse by giving orders direct to the men, and to Sergeant Clark, instead of through Barter — and yet, like a good soldier, Captain Barter speaks no word of disparagement of his Commanding Officer in the account he has left us. Parkinson's resignation from the regiment has been noted, and we might also recall the extraordinary way in which Durnford repeated Barter's warning about the unreliability of his men in front of the men themselves.

To return to the order not to fire the first shot, why was the order given in the first place? It is possible that Pine was actuated by his wish that the whole affair should be regarded as a police action rather than a military one. W.R. Guest suggests that Pine probably had in mind the fact that the three days of grace granted by the Government to the amaHlubi in which to surrender would not have elapsed by the Monday morning, when it had been planned for the Volunteers to reach the head of the pass. Whatever the reason, Pine was wrong to hamstring his commander in the field in this way, and Durnford was equally wrong in accepting it.

And finally, there is the inexplicable breakdown in morale of the Carbineers, a breakdown completely foreign to this fine regiment. But let us not be too hard on them. Most of the men were young lads, scarcely out of their teens. They had had no previous experience in battle. For 36 hours they had been in the saddle, with no food and little sleep, battling their way over some of the most difficult country imaginable. They were in an unknown land, savage in the extreme, surrounded by an implacable and well-armed foe, abandoned, it would seem, by Allison's promised support column, and with their own numbers badly depleted through the inability of some of the men to stay the pace. Added to which is the peculiar and unnerving sense of loneliness and isolation that the summit of the Drakensberg produces on even the most experienced men. It is felt by some mountaineers even today. What must it have been like in those days, when the country was totally unknown, and communications such as we know today, simply did not exist?

And let us always remember that it was, after all, only a small group of men, in the Pietermaritzburg contingent, who panicked and started the rot. Many of the rest of the Pietermaritzburg men responded promptly to Durnford's call for loyalty, and it was Pietermaritzburg men who died. On their part the Karkloof men acted magnificently. Losses would have been much heavier had it not been for their skill and coolness. We have already noted the dramatic rescue of Varty by Speirs and Fannin, both Karkloof men. Panic is a dreadful thing, unreasoning, unpredictable, frightening. The best can succumb to it: no one can claim exemption. I saw it once: I do not wish to see it again. It is obvious that the nerves of a few men broke, and there was no one to steady the rest.

Major Durnford's camp at Bushman's River (Giant's Castle), 1873

Killie Campbell Africana Library

The whole affair was the subject of

a Military Court of Enquiry 12 months later, held at the request of the Carbineers themselves. The judgment of the Court, given on 12 December 1874, was that the Volunteers were guilty of a "disorganised and precipitate retreat, with, however, mitigating circumstances".

And let us always remember, in the final analysis, that Isandhlwana, a short five years later, made up gloriously for any possible shame at Bushman's River Pass. There Colonel Dunford himself, together with Lieutenant Scott and 22 of the men of the same regiment that had let him down at the pass, fell in action together, side by side. They could have escaped. They preferred to remain and die fighting. When their ammunition was finished they threw down their guns and drew their pistols. They used these as long as they could, and then they formed a line, shoulder to shoulder and back to back, and fought with their knives until the last man fell.

Much of the blame for the panic at the pass must go to Sergeant Clark, for what Sir Benjamin Pine called his "shameful and mutinous conduct". He was a Regular Army pensioner, who had been appointed Sergeant Major to the Carbineers by Lieutenant Colonel Milles to stiffen the inexperienced Carbineers. He had been through the 1851-52 Frontier War in the Cape, and had served for 17 years in the CMR, 10 of these as Troop Sergeant Major. Experienced in native warfare, his sudden cry that they had been betrayed and were about to be murdered would be believed, and it undoubtedly triggered the initial panic. On their return to Meshlynn, at 1.30 am on the Wednesday, while on their way to their base at Fort Nottingham, he promptly packed up and went home, because "he did not like the way Major Durnford had treated him"! He was later dismissed, and though he demanded an inquiry before the House of Assembly, this was not granted.

Perhaps the man who came out best from the whole affair was Robert Henry Erskine. He was the son of Major Erskine, Colonial Secretary at the time and a former Regimental Commander of the Carbineers. Born in 1846 in India, he was a great-grandson of the well-known Lord Chancellor, under Pitt. He was educated under William Calder at the infant Pietermaritzburg High School, later Maritzburg College, and at the time of his death was a rising advocate in the Supreme Court. Twenty-seven years of age, he was one of the men who found the early ride from beyond the top of Game Pass particularly exhausting. Sergeant Button, it will be remembered, found him at the top of the climb out of the Lotheni valley, stretched out on the grass, "looking miserably tired". And yet he never thought of himself, and gave himself completely and utterly to others. It was Erskine who twice, in the ensuing night, climbed down to his Commanding Officer in the pass with brandy and other comforts, in spite of his own weariness. He was the first to stand by Durnford at Bushman's River Pass, and he was the first to fall. Throughout he displayed those very qualities of steel-like courage and compassion for others that have made the Natal Carbineers the fine regiment they are today, and it is a pity that the regiment has not been able to perpetuate, in a more fitting way, the memory of this young man, the first Carbineer ever to fall in action.

Grave at the head of Langalibalele Pass shortly after the tragedy

* * *

And so the smoke on the pass drifted away, and the cries of man and beast were stilled. It was defeat, total defeat, as we have said. But once again the inscrutable Drakensberg Mountains spelt out, in letters of gold this time, their ancient story, that the goal itself is less than nothing, fit only to be cast into the limbo of forgotten things. What is to be remembered, and told down the years with pride, is the striving, the agony, and the tears, the selfless courage, even the bitter shame of broken men, pushed beyond the limits of human endurance. For even this adds richness and compassion to the long story of man's unending journey.

Malcolm Pearse

Amphitheatre

Left. The scale of the face of the Amphitheatre is difficult to imagine ... until one looks at the size of the figures standing near the edge of the escarpment!

Right: Devil's Tooth is bracketed by the Eastern Buttress to its left and Inner Tower, at the southern end of the Amphitheatre wall

Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 22

AFTERMATH

Old, unhappy, far-off things
And battles long ago.
Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper"

The dust and the smoke that arose on that quiet Drakensberg pass on a summer's morning in 1873 was as nothing to the uproar that followed. Fears of a general uprising spread rapidly, and men throughout the Colony looked to their guns. Martial Law was proclaimed on 11 November.

According to Hattersley, the whole of the Midlands was seething with unrest. David Gray, at Cathkin, was raided on the night of 16 April 1874. A group of rebels broke into their home and stabbed two of their sons, David and Walter. David was 29 years old, and Walter a lad of 15. David Gray senior, in an adjoining room, heard the noise and ran for his gun. The rebels left, but the same night they burnt down the Nest (now the Nest Hotel), a kilometre or so away. Both David and Walter recovered from their wounds, though David's was serious. Several other houses in the Cathkin area were also attacked, including those of Sclanders, J. Maree and Florey, the latter's being burnt down.

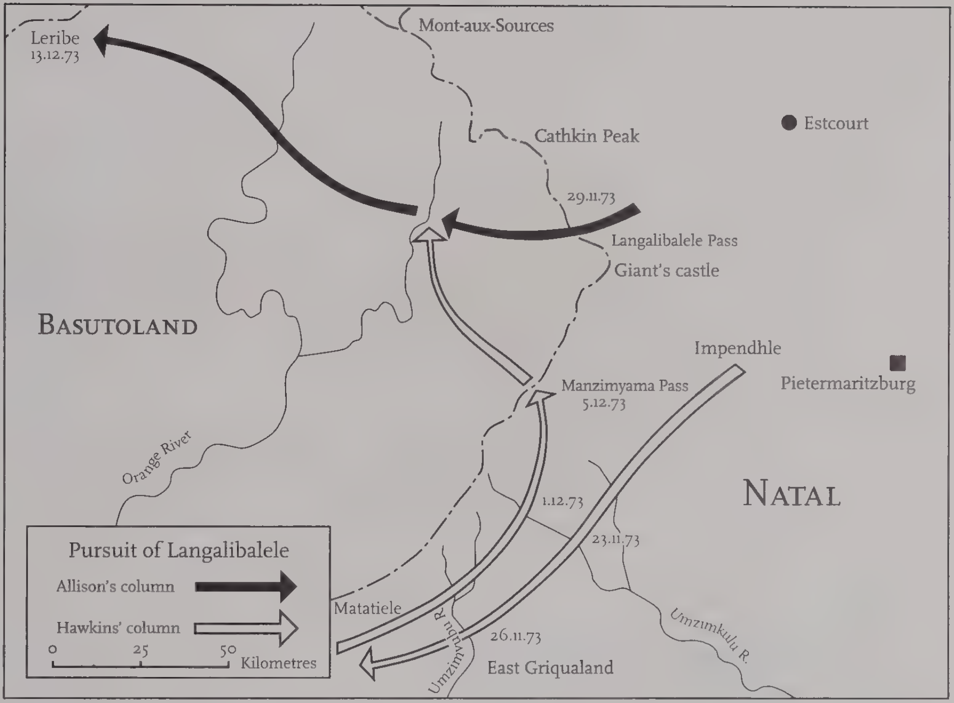
But it was not only in Natal that the alarm was sounded. For the first time in the history of South Africa it was suddenly realised that what touched one touched all, and help was immediately offered from the Cape to the Limpopo. The Governor of the Cape, Sir Henry Barkly, immediately ordered *HMS Rattlesnake* to sail for Natal with 200 officers and men of the 86th Regiment and a small reinforcement of Royal Artillery. The ship sailed on 20 November and reached Durban five days later. The troops were landed and went into camp, but were not required. Sir Henry also ordered the Commandant of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police, stationed at King William's Town, to move a detachment of 200 men into Lesotho. Orders were sent to Colonel C.D. Griffith, the Governor's Agent in Lesotho and to J.M. Orpen, British Resident in Griqualand East, to assist in the apprehension of Langalibalele. Orpen collected a strong force to prevent the retreat of the rebels into Griqualand East. Later he crossed into Lesotho, as we shall see, to assist Captain Allison's flying column. Commandant Bowker, with another detachment of 200 of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police, was sent to the sources of the Caledon River in support of the Natal authorities. The Governments of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic offered help, as also did the diggers on the Diamond Fields. President Burgers of the Transvaal Republic mobilised a force of 200 men on the Republic's eastern border to prevent Langalibalele from seeking asylum with Cetshwayo via the Transvaal. For the first time it was realised that South Africa was one indivisible whole, and the movement towards some form of federation or union was born.

As soon as the military authorities had recovered from the shock of the disaster, it was decided that Langalibalele must be pursued and apprehended at all costs.

It was not until 13 November that it became known that he, together with the bulk of his tribe and cattle, had fled over the pass into Lesotho. But no one was quite sure what he would do after that. All that was known was that he had disappeared into the heart of Lesotho, a wild and desolate country, unmapped and unknown. It was thought that he might head south-westwards in the direction of Griqualand East, or Nomansland, as it was then known, where he had a brother. On the other hand, he had been in close touch with the Basotho Chief Molapo, whose domain was near Leribe in the north-east. He might head there. It was decided to send two flying columns after him, one under Captain Hawkins and one under Captain Allison.

Captain Hawkins had in his column 50 members of the Richmond

Mounted Rifles and the Natal and Karkloof Carbineers. His object was a thrust south-westwards, along the foot of the Drakensberg, to head Langalibalele off in case he should decide to go in that direction. Assembling at the Impendhle mountain, they crossed the emZimkhulu on 23 November, and reached the umZimvubu three days later. There they found Adam Kok, the Griqua Chief, with 600 to 1 000 mounted men, together with Orpen and Grant with 200 of the Cape Frontier Armed and Mounted Police. There was no sign of Langalibalele, but it was obvious that he would be well cared for in case he should head in that direction. Hawkins therefore decided to return and to link up with Allison's force, which had ascended the Bushman's River Pass on 29 November, and were heading for Leribe. He recrossed the emZimkhulu on 1 December, and on 5 December ascended the Drakensberg by the amaNzi'myama Pass (the present Sani Pass). On 7 December he effected a junction with Allison on the east branch of the Orange River. By that time he had 46 whites with him and 350 blacks; 280 of these blacks were now sent home and Hawkins proceeded with his mixed force of 116 men.


Leribe
13.12.73
Mont-aux-Sources
Cathkin Peak
Estcourt
29.11.73
Langalibalele Pass
Giant's castle
BASUTOLAND
Impendhle
Pietermaritzburg
Manzimyama Pass
5.12.73
Orange River
NATAL
1.12.73
23.11.73
Pursuit of Langalibalele
Allison's column
Hawkins' column
0
25
50
Kilometres
Matatiele
Umzimvubu R.
26.11.73
East Griqualand
Umzimkulu R.

Allison's force consisted of about 50 whites from the Natal Frontier Guard and the Weenen Yeomanry Cavalry, together with about 1 600 blacks. They were provisioned for one month, had ascended the Bushman's River Pass on 29 November, and had headed north-west, hot on Langalibalele's trail.

The story of this epic trek across the wilds of Lesotho has never been told, and it never will be told fully, for few records of it were kept. The country was completely unknown and mountainous beyond all telling. A military map compiled and lithographed at the Intelligence Branch of the Quartermaster General's Department in June 1879 shows the area as almost completely blank, and merely marked "Deep rocky valleys infested by Wild Bushmen. Littleknown Country".

Sir John Robinson, in *A Life-time in South Africa* says:

> The story of this expedition has never been properly told ... No "special" correspondents accompanied it, no postmen or runners bore back news of it ... They disappeared from sight and hearing after sending to Maritzburg an assurance that the objects of the mission would be accomplished "handsomely and well" — a promise that was fulfilled to the letter. And practically nothing more was heard from the expedition until it had done its work. It groped its way amongst the precipices and defiles, skirting the edges of brawling torrents, camping at times under the eaves of overhanging crags, scaling nameless mountain heights, or scrambling into the depths of rock-strewn valleys — all void, silent and lifeless — ever on the alert for a hidden foe. After each day's hard march they slept the sleep that follows as of right dutiful fatigue, and they rose at dawn, refreshed and confident, to resume the chase.

Allison himself paid a high compliment to his men. The Volunteers, he said, had behaved splendidly, and were a fine body of men. Throughout the expedition he had no occasion to reprimand a single man, and from the black levies, who suffered severely from the cold, there were no complaints at all, and only one case of punishment for neglect of duty.

The Orange River was crossed by an improvised punt made of raw bullock hides sewn together, the Maluti Mountains traversed, and soon the freshness of the trail began to show that the rebels were not far ahead. On the evening of 11 December a spot was reached where there were clear signs that the rebels had only recently left, and were in a hurry. As the fugitives could not now be very far ahead, Allison decided to abandon his heavy baggage and to push on immediately with a smaller and lighter force, provisioned for three days. The final leg of the pursuit started at dawn the next day. By noon they started to pass many exhausted cattle and horses, and at 4 pm they came up with a large herd of cattle in a valley 40 km north-east of Leribe.

But Langalibalele had already been captured. A few days before a large force of armed Basotho, supported by 120 Frontier Armed and Mounted Police under Griffith, had moved out from Leribe, heading north-east. In the meantime Langalibalele had surrendered, actually on 11 December, to his reputed friend Molapo, who had lured him towards his kraal, 15 km outside Leribe. With him he had 24 of his men. Molapo promptly handed him over to Griffith, who was waiting for him. This could perhaps explain the bad relations that exist to this day between the Basotho and the Nguni tribes to the east.

On the following day 200 more surrendered, but the main body refused to capitulate, and took up a position in the mountains. Here a short, sharp engagement took place, in which 10 of the rebels were killed and the rest dispersed. Amongst the dead was Jantjie, son of Selile, who had claimed to have fired the first shot at the pass. Mabuhle was captured, but a few nights later he slipped his handcuffs, and together with one of Langalibalele's sons, he escaped.

On the following day, 13 December, Allison and Hawkins arrived, and Langalibalele was handed over to them, together with all his men. Nine days later, on 22 December, Orpen and 200 Frontier Armed and Mounted Police also arrived, after a long and arduous journey through the heart of Lesotho.

Allison, with Langalibalele, five of his sons, four headmen, six to seven thousand captured head of cattle and some hundreds of horses, started their long trek home on 21 December.

They travelled through the Witsieshoek area and down Van Reenen's Pass, but owing to the large number of cattle, their progress was slow. Even so, they entered Natal on Christmas Day, and reached the capital on the last day of the year. Langalibalele's arrival in Pietermaritzburg, in chains, so soon after his open defiance of the Government, produced a most salutary effect on the rest of the population.

In the meantime it had been decided that it was necessary to deal with the rest of the amaHlubi and Putini tribes. Langalibalele had left all the women and children, together with the older men, behind in the location. These unfortunate people had taken refuge in the caves of the mountains, and they had to be ferreted out. It was decided to break up both the amaHlubi and the Putini tribes, for although the Putinis had not taken part in the rebellion, it was felt they had at least been in collusion with Langalibalele. The cordon which had been thrown round the two tribes was first strengthened, and then heralds were sent into the two locations calling upon all remaining members of the two tribes to give themselves up. Then the cordon moved in, and started to sweep through the reserves.

For the next six weeks the work went on. Although the Natal Government later tried to defend itself, there is no doubt that excesses were committed. Durnford himself had spoken about "avenging" the "murder" of his men at the pass, and had to be gently reprimanded by his friend, Bishop Colenso. Two field guns were brought up, and the forests on the southern slopes of iNtaba'mhlope shelled. On one occasion a man hid behind a large rock in a cave, and held his attackers at bay for a long time. He eventually surrendered, was brought out, and promptly shot! Many letters boasting about these savage reprisals appeared in the press. The Natal Colonist, whose editor was a man by the name of Sanderson, a close personal friend of Bishop Colenso, said, "We have hitherto refrained from publishing (these letters) because they seem to us a disgrace to humanity". Altogether, something like 200 men, women and children appear to have been killed. These things, of course, cannot be excused. But it is equally certain that many of the reports were deliberately exaggerated.

What started as a mild controversy soon developed into an uproar. Overseas the Anti-Slavery Society, the Peace Society, and the Aborigines' Protection Society, piled in with all their guns. As far back as 1843, J.C. Chase had described this latter society as "a body of respectable and benevolent individuals, but lamentably ignorant of Colonial affairs, and grossly imposed upon by designing men". In Natal most of the furore centred around the figure of Bishop Colenso and his family.

The Bishop was a prominent figure at this time in the history of Natal. A brilliant mathematician and scholar (his mathematics textbooks were used for many years in England), he had been appointed the first Bishop of Natal in 1853. He arrived in Durban on 23 January 1854, and on his first day in Natal was told by leading men in his white congregation never to indulge a black. He at once devoted himself to acquiring a sound knowledge of the Zulu language, into which he translated the New Testament. He became an advanced thinker, and his liberal theological views were far in advance of the time. The subsequent controversy which raged around him in the 1850s and 1860s, his trial before an ecclesiastical court, and his subsequent excommunication are too well known to need repeating here. Now, at the age of 60, probably at the height of his powers, a much-loved and saintly man, he championed the cause of Langalibalele and his tribe. He was ably supported by his two daughters, Frances and Harriet. Brookes and Webb, in their *History of Natal*, sum him up in the following words: "As a missionary he was outstanding, as a theologian, highly controversial." And may we perhaps add, "as a priest, distinctly turbulent".

Bishop Colenso's youngest and eldest daughters, Agnes and Harriet

Meanwhile, as time went on, the uproar in Natal showed no signs of abating. Angered at what they felt was distorted and unfair criticism, the colonists, almost to a man, rallied to the support of the Government, the military and the Carbineers. The Press was sharply divided. A small section of the Natal Press, notably the *Natal Colonist*, together with the *Cape Argus*, championed Langalibalele. The rest were 100 per cent pro-Government and anti-Colenso. A mass meeting of citizens was held in Durban, which affirmed their faith in the measures the Government had taken to put down the uprising, and protested against the methods employed by the Peace Society. (The wrathful editor of the *Natal Witness* advised the Peace Society to change its name!) They were supported by the inhabitants of Alexandria County in a numerously signed memorial testifying to the correctness of the methods employed by the Government, while 74 ministers of religion, and a number of missionaries, dissociated themselves from Bishop Colenso, and signed a manifesto stating that "we feel and affirm that the action of the Natal Government was throughout humane, lenient, just and urgently necessary". The Bishop became the most detested man in Natal.

What we may call the humanitarian point of view, for want of a better term, is always a valid one, and there must always be a voice for it. It is a thousand pities that its protagonists so often allow themselves to be led into wild exaggerations, the distortion of some facts and the ignoring of others, for by doing so they weaken their case. It was so in Colenso's day: it is the same today, when the mantle of the Colensos, father and daughters, has fallen upon the shoulders of the Canon Collinses, the Father Huddlestones and the David Sheppards of the twentieth century.

The Colensos had a good case. They came near to losing it by overstatement and blind prejudice. This was especially so in the case of Frances and Harriet. There is a bitterness, a deliberate distortion, about so many of their statements that is hard to understand. "It is no secret,"

Bishop Colenso and his daughter Frances Ellen

Killie Campbell Africana Library

said Harriet in one of her letters, "that two of the foremost runaways were Mr Charles Barter, Captain of the Troop, and his factotum, Sgt Clark," — a statement justified, perhaps, in the case of the latter, but certainly, at the very least, unkind in the case of the former. Later she says, "The volunteers ran away, trying to throw all the blame on Major Durnford, whom they so coolly left in the jaws of the enemy." And talking of Governor Pine, Frances called him "weak and vacillating", and expressed the hope that he would soon be recalled. This is certainly not the verdict of history! One looks in vain, in their outpourings, for any note of pity or compassion for any of the *dramatis personae* except the "downtrodden savage".

If the mopping-up operations provided good ammunition for the Colensos, the circumstances of the trial, when Langalibalele was finally brought to judgment on 16 January 1874, gave them more than they could ever have hoped for. And it must be admitted that it was a most extraordinary trial, and a disgrace to British justice.

Theophilus Shepstone

Campbell Collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal

It was decided to try the Chief under Native Law, and here the very first of the many anomalies appears, for under Native Law he would never have been tried at all. He would have met his death immediately on the field of battle, for to the black tribesman the penalty for treason was automatic and instant death. For his two chief judges he had his two chief accusers, Sir Benjamin Pine, the Lieutenant Governor and Supreme Chief of the Zulus, and Theophilus Shepstone, Secretary for Native Affairs. They were assisted by four magistrates and six "loyal" black chiefs, all nominees of the Government. No judge of the Supreme Court was invited to sit on the Bench, although legally the charge of treason could only be heard in the Supreme Court. The prosecutor was John Shepstone, brother of the Secretary of Native Affairs. The prisoner was found guilty on the first day of the trial, evidence was heard against him on the second day, he was only allowed Counsel on the third day, but Counsel was not allowed to interview the prisoner! Nor was the prisoner allowed the right of cross-examination! Finally, the sentence of banishment, which the Court pronounced on him, was in itself illegal, as no Native Court was competent to impose such a sentence. When the Lord Chancellor described the trial in the House of Lords, he was greeted by loud laughter from his assembled Peers.

This was all, and more, than the good Bishop could stomach. He sailed in, with guns blazing! Two years previously another, and still more famous, Oxford mathematician had written, in *Through the Looking Glass*: "He's in prison now, being punished; and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all!" I hope the reverend prelate had noted the appositeness of these words, and had the wit to use them!

Langalibalele was sentenced to banishment for life. The Cape Government came to the rescue of a highly embarrassed Natal Government by offering Robben Island as the place of his detention, for Natal had nowhere to send him. And to Robben Island he was sent, with the intention that he would end his days there.

But Bishop Colenso continued relentlessly his long fight to see that justice was done. He went over to England to plead his case personally, and eventually he was successful in getting the sentence quashed. The British Government intervened, and in August 1875 Langalibalele was allowed to return to the mainland, first of all to the farm Uitvlugt in the Cape, and later to Oude Molen, where he was given comfortable quarters. Here, in 1881, he was visited by Dr J.W. Matthews, vice-president of the Legislative Council of the Cape, who found him sitting on the trunk of a tree at the side of a brick-built cottage, "blear-eyed, old, decrepit, and almost in rags". In 1887 he was allowed to return to Natal. He was confined to the Swartkop Location, near Pietermaritzburg, under Chief Teteleku, and there he died in 1889, a shadow of his former self. He was buried in a secret grave in the foothills of the Drakensberg. For 61 years the place remained a closely guarded secret until, in October 1950, his grandson, by then Chief of the amaHlubi tribe, revealed the site to C.J. van Schalkwyk, Native Commissioner of Estcourt. It is on the farm Eland's Park, adjoining the Giant's Castle Game Reserve.

He is still remembered by many in Natal and Lesotho. Many years ago, while mountaineering in Lesotho, I came across an old man who told me that Langalibalele had passed that way on his long retreat. In

Natal he is remembered as a great rainmaker, as the man who, for a brief while, defied the might of the British Empire, as the "sun that is always boiling hot". There is talk still of the strange eclipse of the sun on 16 April 1874, immediately after sentence had been passed on him, and there is still talk of the violent floods in the Transkei of the same year. Indeed, he was a great rainmaker, a mighty man, an *inYanga*[1] of note, even in the bitterness of defeat.

As we have already said, the Langalibalele affair had a profound effect on the future of South Africa, and even had its echoes overseas, where it played a small, but not unimportant, part in the downfall of Gladstone's Liberal Government. It brought about extensive constitutional reforms in Natal, which we need not go into here. "The year 1873," said Sir John Robinson, "marked the turning-point of Imperial policy in South Africa." In particular, the Shepstone system of native administration was shaken to its foundations and reformed. From it stemmed the Native High Court, established in 1875, which for 80 years dispensed justice with fairness, impartiality and humanity. The Langalibalele affair marked the termination of Shepstone's long rule of 30 years over the black people of Natal. The establishment of the Native High Court deprived him of his judicial functions. From 1876 onwards he was more concerned in Imperial and Transvaal affairs, although, as Brookes and Webb have pointed out, "Shepstonism" lived on, right up to the time of Union. Above all, it emphasised the necessity for a uniform native policy for South Africa, a policy which could only be achieved through some form of federation or union.

And it is also to be noted that it probably saved Natal at the time of Isandhlwana. The pitiful under-garrisoning of the Colony in the face of the growing Zulu power now came searchingly under the spotlight, and remedial measures were immediately taken. When, five years later, the storm broke, Natal had a sizeable body of seasoned troops on whom she could rely, and she was able to ride out the storm. Without Langalibalele she might have been overwhelmed and, to quote C.J. Uys in *The Era of Shepstone*, "drowned in a sea of human blood".

Finally, it affected profoundly the lives and careers of a number of personalities implicated in it, and shattered a number of fine friendships. Sir Benjamin Pine, a popular and energetic Governor, was recalled and put on pension. He was replaced by Sir Garnet Wolseley, one of the most colourful administrators Natal has ever known. It was the end of a potentially great and promising career.

It was also the end of the friendship between Shepstone and Colenso. During his earlier ecclesiastical troubles Shepstone had stood loyally behind the Bishop. He had accompanied the Bishop on the latter's initial tour of his new Diocese, and the two men had become firm friends. It was Colenso's invariable custom to have Sunday lunch with the Shepstones after the morning service at St Peter's Church. One Sunday at the height of the controversy they met as usual, but a heated argument arose. As Colenso left, he was seen to stand on the front steps of the house, and say: "I shall never enter this house again." And as far as we know he never did. This break in their friendship was a deep hurt to two very fine men, and neither of them ever got over it. Colenso himself said: "I longed for the time when I might see you and speak with you again as of old." Harriet, also writing to Shepstone, said: "I know that he (her father) has loved you better than any other man in the world, and reverenced and looked up to you as the embodiment and realisation of all his own ideas of what a man should be." But it is to be noted that Colenso was the more bitter of the two. Though the breach was never healed, Shepstone, on several occasions in later years, acted more than generously towards his old friend.

If Colenso became the most hated man in Natal, Durnford must have come a close second, for in outlook and ideals, especially on the native question, the two men were very close. The colonists, to a man, turned against him, and blamed him for the fiasco at the pass. Abusive letters began to appear in the Press, including a ribald poem which became immensely popular in the pubs of the city. Only the Colensos and Sanderson, editor of the *Natal Colonist*, stood by him. Always an ascetic, he largely withdrew from social life, and the only home that was open to him was that of Bishop Colenso. Even his favourite dog was poisoned. The wounds he had received in the engagement had been serious: he never regained the use of his left arm, which he always kept hidden inside his jacket, but not once in the days following the action did he report sick. The Government gave him a disability pension of £100 per annum, but after his death it was discovered that he had never touched a penny of it.

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[1] *inYanga*: an expert witchdoctor (Zulu).

To add to his troubles, he and Fanny Colenso now fell hopelessly in love with each other. As a young man of 24 he had married the daughter of a retired Lieutenant Colonel, but the marriage had not been a success, and after a carefully hushed-up scandal involving his wife, the couple had separated. Divorce was out of the question for a man who held the Queen's commission, and Durnford solved the problem by simply taking his postings abroad, while his family brought up his daughter. He was now 44 years old and he had not seen his wife for 10 years. Fanny was a frail and lovely girl, just turned 25, but already showing signs of the tuberculosis which was eventually to kill her. Natal in those days, like any small provincial community, thrived on gossip and tittle-tattle, and who could have wished for a juicier bit of scandal than something connected with a Colenso or a Durnford! But so closely did the two guard their secret that no inkling of it ever leaked out, and there was never even a breath of suspicion. Confined as they were in the strict Victorian morality of the time, there was no solution to the problem except the death of Mrs Durnford, and she was to outlive them both. Durnford fell at Isandhlwana, in 1879. Poor little Fanny carried her pathetic secret with her to her grave in 1887. It was only after her death, when her letters were published, and when the authorship of the biographical sketch she had written on the life of the man she loved, under the pseudonym of Atherton Wylde, was revealed, that the story leaked out.

Grave and memorial at head of Langalibalele Pass, 2001

John Hone

Throughout Natal, for the next five years, the controversy continued to rage. When the ladies gathered on the green lawns of Government House for the Governor's tea parties, when the officers assembled in the Mess up at Fort Napier, when the transport riders relaxed round their camp fires after the day's trek, when the gossiping farmers' wives from the Dargle met under the syringa trees on the Market Square while their husbands attended Ferreira's open-air market, or downed their beers at the "Plough", the main talking point was always Langalibalele, and poor Sir Benjamin Pine, and the "wicked" Bishop and that "scoundrel" Durnford. Until one day there came the thunderclap of Isandhlwana, and all the talk was swept away.

* * *

On 17 November 1873, a fortnight after the action, Bushman's River Pass was visited once again. Major Durnford had been despatched with 60 men of the 75th Regiment, 30 Basotho and a force of 400 blacks, to occupy the pass and to bury the dead. They were accompanied by Sir William Beaumont, Private Secretary to Sir Benjamin Pine, and by the Reverend G. Smith, minister of

St John's Church, Weston, who was to conduct the burial service. Five years later Smith was to fight gallantly, shoulder to shoulder with the men of the 24th Foot, in the defence of Rorke's Drift.

They ascended the pass on 18 November. Very little had been disturbed. Round the lip of the pass still lay the scattered debris of a deserted battlefield — abandoned shields, broken assegais, items of equipment, three dead horses, and the bodies of the slain. Erskine and Bond were found lying close together. Potterill lay a little farther off. High up in the blue sky a couple of vultures wheeled, and the wind sighed in the short, tufted grass.

The burial service took place the next day with military honours. The two men whom Durnford had shot were buried under one cairn of stones. The other five were buried under another, larger, cairn, under which they lie peacefully sleeping to this day. Over the stones a large wooden cross was erected. The haunting notes of the Last Post floated over the desolate crags, and the men moved away.

But one man remained. For several moments he stood with bowed head, a lonely figure, looking down on the cairn and the grave of the men whom he had commanded. Then he stooped, dug up some white everlastings growing nearby, and reverently planted them among the stones. A few of the flowers he saved, and these, together with some locks of hair he had cut from the dead, he sent later to the relatives of the men who lay below. Then he, too, turned and left.

* * *

Ninety years rolled by, and on 5 May 1963 those mountain solitudes were again invaded, and the pass was once again climbed, by men of the same Regiment, Carbineers past and present. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bob de Carle, Regimental Commander, they carried with them a new and stronger cross, made of aluminium, for over the years the old cross had broken down. Ribald jokes and gay chatter accompanied the men as they toiled up the pass, but at the top a silence fell as they approached the cairn. The working party was soon busy, the new cross erected, and then, with bowed heads, the men gathered round for the dedication service. Today it remains one of my most abiding memories of the Drakensberg, for I had been asked to conduct it. A short reading and then a prayer, and then came the last words of the dedication:

The erection of the new cross, 5 May 1963. Reg Pearse (centre) with historian Ken Gillings on his left Godfrey Symons

They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.

Once again the notes of the Last Post rang out, sounded this time by Sergeant Bugler Gerrit Booysens of the Estcourt High School cadet band. The echoes died away among the peaks. The men left, and once again the pass was wrapped in silence. In the nooks and crannies of the stones there still grew a few white everlastings.

THE LANGALIBALELE 'REBELLION' AND THE iNHLATHIMBE PASS:
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

(Note: This should be read in conjunction with the map on page 310)

Ever since the Langalibalele engagement at the head of the Bushman's River Pass, a number of errors in connection with the "Rebellion" have been perpetuated. Writing in 1895 J. Forsyth Ingram, in The Colony of Natal, says: "Away up amidst the peaks of Giant's Castle there is a spot held sacred by every true Natalian, for there a small party of colonists, sixty in number, held at bay a rebellious mass of natives, five thousand strong."

The colonists were not 60 in number: there were only 32. There were not 5 000 tribesmen in the pass: there were only 200. And the colonists certainly did not hold the 5 000 at bay: they ran away!

One cardinal error has been made by the majority of historians, including Theal. This is to the effect that the Carbineers, in attempting to intercept Langalibalele, rode up Giant's Castle Pass. They did not. I believe that they rode up iNhlathimbe Pass, 17,8 km away.

In an attempt to clear up the matter I have gone over every inch of the ground covered by the Carbineers. I know it thoroughly, and I have studied all the accounts left by Colonel Durnford, Captain Barter, and many others. The evidence that Giant's Castle Pass was not used is overwhelming, although every contemporary account says it was used. The position is as follows:

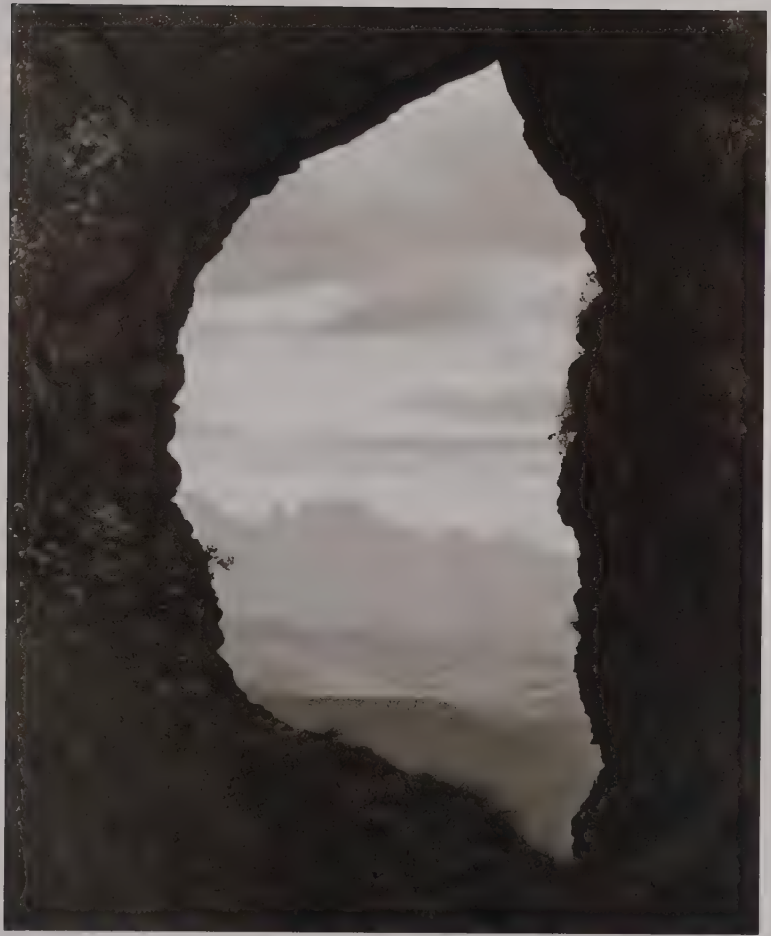
There are only four passes in the area that the Carbineers could have ascended. They are as follows:

1. Bushman's River Pass, now called Langalibalele Pass. This is the pass where the actual engagement took place, and was the pass ascended by Langalibalele and his tribesmen in their flight into Lesotho. Some historians have named this as the pass ascended by the Carbineers, but this is impossible, as in that case they must have climbed side by side with the tribesmen, when their object was to prevent Langalibalele's men from climbing the pass. Also it is quite clear that the Carbineers rode for a number of kilometres along the summit of the Drakensberg, after they had ascended their pass, before they reached the scene of the engagement.
2. Giant's Castle Pass, exactly 8 km south of Bushman's River Pass in a straight line, situated at the spot where Giant's Castle abuts on the main Berg. Apparently this was the pass which the military had planned to use. I give below my reasons for thinking that the Carbineers did not use this pass.
3. iNhlathimbe Pass, 17,8 km south of Bushman's River Pass, and 9,8 km south of Giant's Castle Pass. I believe that it was up this pass that the Carbineers climbed.
4. Lahlingubo Pass, a couple of kilometres still further south of iNhlathimbe Pass. This would be accessible to horsemen, but there would be no point in the Carbineers using this pass. They were already 12 hours late, and too far south. Nothing would be gained by going still further south, when a pass suitable in every way, and accessible (iNhlathimbe Pass), was at hand.

These last two passes look down on a number of rivers, including the Lotheni, the iBohle and the iNhlathimbe, all of which flow into the emKhomazi. At the time of the Langalibalele engagement they were all called, loosely, "the sources of the Umkomaas". The Lotheni was known by its present name, but not apparently the Bohle nor the iNhlathimbe. Neither of these last two names are to be found in contemporary records.

We may note the following points:

1. Durnford's military instructions were to go up Giant's Gastle Pass.
2. Barter, Household, Sergeant Clark, Parkinson, Button, Varty, John Otter Jackson, Bucknall, Jaffray and Durnford himself, all of whom



Malcolm Pearse

iNtunja - The Eye of the Needle

In 1874 Col. A.W. Durnford described iNtunja as a "hill with a most extraordinary hole in its crest, through which the sky can be seen". Fortunately the Zulu name, more poetic than Gatberg, has been retained took part in the expedition, left personal accounts of the action at the head of the pass, and of the ride there and back. (The first two pages of Varty's account, describing the ride to the pass, are missing, but the rest of the account is complete.) All accounts say they went up Giant's Castle Pass.

3. But an examination of these accounts shows quite clearly that: (a) after climbing the Little Berg via Game Pass and proceeding a short distance, they had Giant's Castle on their right: if they had been heading for Giant's Castle Pass it should have been on their left; and (b) after leaving Game Pass they turned left, went down into the sources of the emKhomazi, crossed the Lotheni, and then headed south-west into the pass they eventually climbed. This is quite definite. Not one account describes the country between Game Pass and Giant's Castle Pass, country which is not characterised by steep slopes and tremendous valleys which the Carbineers negotiated. I have checked this; I have been over the ground. Button, for instance, says: "We descended into the Umkomaas." Bucknall says: "We went down into the valley of the Umkomaas." Jackson says: "(From the summit of Game Pass) we worked our way through the kloofs of the sources of the Umkomaas, in order to get into Giant's Castle Pass." Jaffray says: "We turned down towards our left ... and descended into the Umkomaas, crossed the Loteni, and went up the other — [side? word undecipherable]." The others are equally definite, with the exception of Barter, who is a little vague, but who still does not describe the country between Game Pass and Giant's Castle Pass.
4. Sir John Robinson, in A Lifetime in South Africa (1900) says quite clearly: "They ascended by the sources of the Umkomaas". This statement alone, if it can be accepted, definitely rules out Giant's Castle Pass.
5. Charles Barter gives a vivid description of the approaches to the pass they climbed. It was "the very birthplace and nursery of rivers". Waterfalls streamed down the face of the Berg. Huge krantzes frowned above, with masses of unburnt grass and moss hanging down the rocks, "a sombre and malignant scene". This description fits the approaches to the iNhlathimbe Pass exactly. By no stretch of the imagination could it fit the approaches to any of the other passes.
6. Apart from the approaches, the pass itself (the iNhlathimbe) is exactly as described by the men who climbed it — just negotiable by horses, but choked at the top with masses of great boulders. None of the other passes are choked at the top with boulders.
7. Among contemporary references (Magistrates' Reports, accounts of Bushman raids, etc.) I cannot find a single reference to Giant's Castle Pass ever having been used. It was not a recognised route into Lesotho. But there are innumerable references to a pass sometimes called "Proudfoot's Pass" about 8 km south of Giant's Castle.
8. On the night of 24 July 1869, four years prior to the Langalibalele affair, William Popham, farming at Meshlynn, had been raided by Bushmen. The stolen cattle had been driven up a pass "to the south of Giant's Castle". Charles Barter, in his account of the "Rebellion", says the pass up which they climbed was the one up which Popham's cattle had been driven in the raid of 1869, i.e. a pass south of Giant's Castle.
9. Durnford estimated the distance they rode from the top of the pass they climbed to the Bushman's River Pass as about 12 miles (19,3 km); the distance from iNhlathimbe Pass to the Bushman's River Pass, in a straight line, is 11 miles (17,8 km), while the distance from Giant's Castle Pass to the Bushman's River Pass is only five miles (8 km). The time taken to ride from the head of the pass they climbed to Bushman's River Pass (about four hours) again makes it clear that they did not ride from Giant's Castle Pass. This is a ride of only one and a half hours at the most.
10. All accounts of the Langalibalele affair agree that after the engagement the Carbineers followed the same route home as they had taken on their ride to Bushman's River Pass. They certainly went home down one of the tributaries of the emKhomazi. Therefore they must have ascended via one of the same tributaries.
11. And finally, I doubt very much whether a troop of horsemen would have been able to ascend Giant's Castle Pass, especially at night. It is too difficult. Dr F.B. Wright, Warden of Lotheni Game Reserve, who knows the pass well, is of the opinion that a man mounted on a wiry Basotho pony might, alone, negotiate it with a great deal of difficulty, but not a troop of mounted men. I agree with him.

The conclusion is, therefore, inescapable that the Carbineers did not ride up Giant's Castle Pass, but up another pass which can only be iNhlathimbe Pass.

What, then, had happened?

There are only two possibilities.

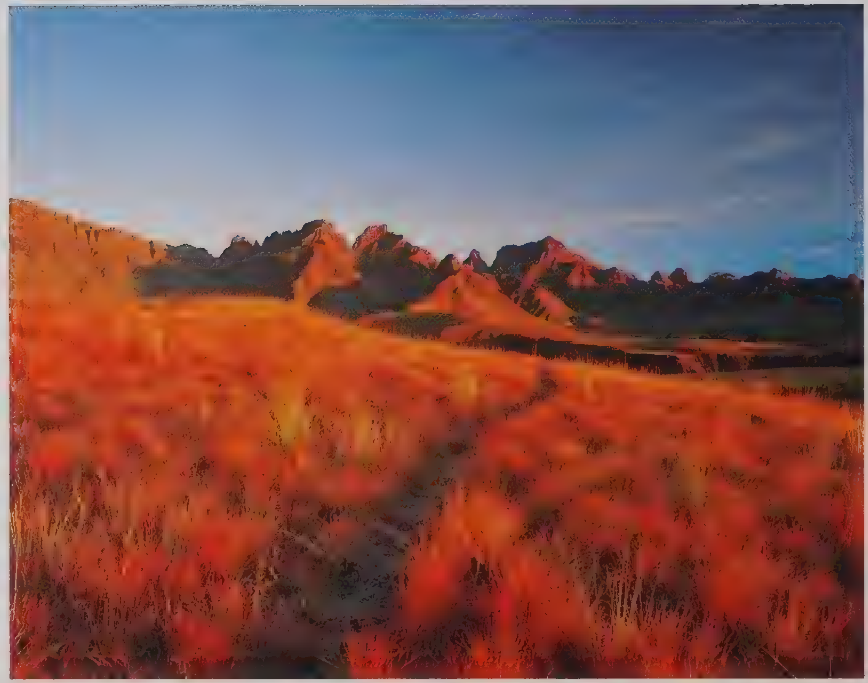
Either iNhlathimbe Pass was called, loosely, in those days, Giant's Castle Pass (it is, remember, in the Giant's Castle area) and the military had planned all along to use it, or the military had planned to use the more northern pass known today as Giant's Castle Pass, and somewhere along the line a mistake had been made, and the men had gone up the wrong pass.

The first possibility is quite untenable. Firstly, I can find no contemporary map which calls iNhlathimbe Pass "Giant's Castle Pass", while there is at least one map, the Stocker Map (1888), which has the name Giant's Castle Pass in its correct, present-day, position. Secondly, an examination of Grantham's map, which the military were using at the time, shows fairly level country between Meshlynn and Giant's Castle Pass (which Durnford had been told to expect), and very broken country between Meshlynn and iNhlathimbe Pass. (Incidentally, neither pass is actually marked in this map.)

But an examination of the military map enclosed in Sir Benjamin Pine's despatch of 13 November 1873 to the Earl of Kimberley finally disposes of the matter. Even this map does not actually name Giant's Castle Pass, but Giant's Castle is named, and all the lines indicating the proposed military movements prior to the action at the head of Bushman's River Pass converge in this map, on the present Giant's Castle Pass, and not on iNhlathimbe Pass.

The conclusion is, therefore, inescapable: the military had planned to use Giant's Castle Pass. A mistake was made, and instead of using this pass, the Carbineers, on their march, diverged left instead of right, and went up iNhlathimbe Pass, 9,8 km south of Giant's Castle. This mistake was the prime cause of the disaster that ensued.

William Popham, as mentioned on page 314, was away from his farm, Meshlynn, when the Carbineers arrived there at 1 am on the morning of 3 November. It was at Meshlynn, roughly, that the two routes (to Giant's Castle Pass and to iNhlathimbe Pass) diverged, and it would have been up to Popham to put the men on to the correct route. In his absence, Durnford must have turned to his Basotho guides for help. They did not know Giant's Castle Pass — it was not a normal route into the interior of Lesotho. They did know iNhlathimbe Pass (Proudfoot's Pass), often used by them and by the Bushmen, as contemporary records clearly show. It was up this pass, therefore, that I believe they elected to lead the Carbineers.



Karl Beath

Above: Cathedral Peak - a sunlit field of deep ochre streches below a craggy backdrop of timeless rock in this peaceful Drakensberg landscape.
Right: View toward Cathedral Peak - Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000, the fractured basalt spires of the Drakensberg separate the low-lying coastal regions from the vast interior platueau of the highveld

Karl Beath

CHAPTER 23

WHAT OF THE FUTURE

It should be our proud tradition to defend it to the limit.
General Smuts, shortly before his death,
speaking of Table Mountain

The Drakensberg is in danger.

A.R. Willcox, well-known authority on the rock art of South Africa, was a great lover of the Drakensberg. In 1956 he wrote:

> Here is one of the finest playgrounds left in this overpopulated planet: here one can still walk fifty miles and see no other human being, except by chance a forester or game ranger, and no mark of man upon the face of nature save the footpaths and the relics of the Bushman race ... But you will see superb scenery and a wealth of wildlife ... and the birdlover and the botanist will find as much to enchant him as will the lover of animals. For good measure there is mountaineering and rock-climbing, and perhaps the largest number of unspoilt rock-painting sites to be found anywhere in the world in an equivalent space.

Fifty years have passed since Wilcox wrote these words, and already much of what he said is sadly out of date. In another fifty years very little of it will be true. Even mountaineering will be largely a thing of the past, except for a few selected peaks, for our rights of way will have gone if we continue as we are doing today.

Why is this? For two very simple reasons. Many South Africans could not care less about the beauty of their country: they despoil, they ravage, they exploit, and they go on their way, uncaring. And secondly, because many of us who do care, and who would not do these things, are too unmindful of our heritage to lift a finger to save it.

The summit of the Amphitheatre, the Plains of Pofung, used to be a place of matchless grandeur, beauty and peace. Today a mountain road has been built from Witsieshoek (now Phuthadijhaba) to the base of the Sentinel, to within an hour and a half of this place of peace, and at times these high solitudes simply swarm with people. I have seen as many as 200 at a time there. The whole area was strewn with beer cans, tissues, filth and garbage. There are no toilet facilities on the summit, and for years the whole area has been a national disgrace.

In September 1971, 24 students, all members of the University Mountain Club from Pietermaritzburg, disgusted at what was happening, and determined to do something about it, cleared the tins away from the immediate vicinity of the hut alone. It took them three hours to flatten the tins, and to pack them into fertilizer bags. Each man carried a fertilizer bag down the mountain, containing 150 tins and weighing 12,5 kg — 24 of these bags! It was impossible, said the leader[1] of the party, to walk more than a metre without stepping on a tin. The bottles they could not cope with. They were broken, and they had to leave them there. Before they left they pinned a notice on the wall of the hut: "These mountains are yours and mine. Please keep them clean." There was little response.

The once-charming Mountain Club hut is a ruin. In the early days it was beautifully equipped with wooden tables, bunks, comfortable mattresses, blankets and pressure stoves. It fell into disrepair, but late in 1986 the Natal Parks Board together with the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources moved in. The hut was repaired, toilet facilities provided, and a system of game guards on permanent duty instituted. Then the Mont-aux-Sources Joint Management Committee of the Natal Parks Board issued the following Press release:

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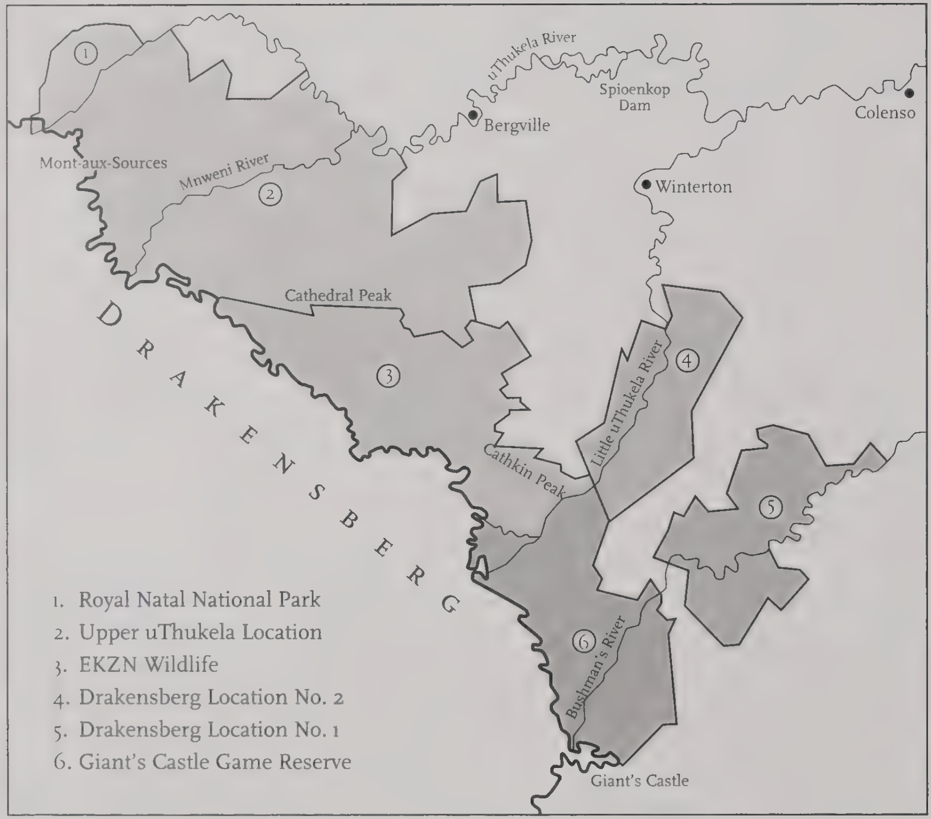
[1] The leader, Alan Palmer, was killed a few months later while descending the cliffs of Cathkin Peak.

> Following a series of meetings and investigations carried out jointly by members of the Natal Parks Board, the Bureau of Natural Resources of the KwaZulu Government, and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry of the QwaQwa Government, over the past two years on the question of proper control of the Mont-aux-Sources plateau and adjacent access route, a number of measures affecting visitor use of this popular summit area of the Drakensberg have been agreed upon. These measures will come into effect on the 25th of June 1988.
>
> Overnight camping on the summit will be restricted to a maximum of 50 campers at a time. The designated camping area lies on the KwaZulu Government territory near to a newly established game guard outpost and may be booked through the Natal Parks Board at Royal Natal National Park, P.O. Mont-Aux-Sources or, alternatively, applied for on arrival at the Sentinel car park at the foot of the route leading to the plateau. No camping will be permitted outside of this campsite or along the route up to the ladder. Toilet facilities have been provided on the summit, thus fulfilling an important environmental and visitor requirement.
>
> A maximum of 50 day visitors will also be permitted entry to the area, in addition to the 50 overnight campers — realising a daily visitor maximum of 100 persons.
>
> These controls were formulated after a careful assessment of the impact of visitor use upon the fragile summit and the growing need for improved safety measures for hikers in this notoriously dangerous Berg area. An emergency shelter coupled with comprehensive radio communication between Royal Natal National Park, the car park, the guard outpost on the summit and the QwaQwa Fire and Emergency Station is a feature of the new system and should help avert unnecessary accidents.
>
> Refuse disposal, always a major problem in this beautiful area, will be controlled through the medium of litter bags issued at the car park and inspected on return. Strict penalties are to be imposed on all offenders.
>
> A management programme is in the process of being completed with the initial focus being on the badly eroded footpaths leading up the face of the slope from the car park, where hikers have caused extensive damage by short-cutting the official route. Work on stabilising this soil erosion problem will be an ongoing project.
>
> Co-operation between the authorities in developing management of the area — long the subject of concern to environmentalists and nature conservation bodies — will continue into the implementation phase with the pooling of expertise and management resources whenever this is necessary.
>
> As a joint exercise between three administratively separate bodies, the result is a resounding success for environmental conservation and will result in an improved quality of experience for visitors to this spectacular Berg area.

At last the authorities tried to act — but it was to be a dismal failure. The toilets failed because they froze in winter, campers used them as receptacles for their rubbish, and because there is not sufficient soil at the summit to install septic tanks or soak pits. The hut was refurbished and a guard outpost established, but it closed after a few years and the hut was again vandalised. The radio communication promised by the Board never happened. As the car park near the Sentinel is not EKZN Wildlife property, the numbers visiting the summit could not be controlled, nor was there any attempt to limit the number of overnight campers. The promise to do something about the badly eroded paths leading from the car park was implemented and the Zig-Zags, the climb to the contour path, was concreted, and work started on other eroded paths. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism provided the funds from its Poverty Relief project.

But there are still major problems: lack of a common vision for the area, inequitable sharing of income, lack of control, and lack of co-ordinated planning, to mention just a few. There are additional layers of complexity and many different organisations have a say in what's going on. These include two district municipalities, a district management area, two local muncipalities, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (an amalgamation of the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation and the Natal Parks Board) as Management Authority of the World Heritage Site, two tribal authorities, the national Department of Environmental Affairs


uThukela River
Spioenkop Dam
Bergville
Colenso
Mont-aux-Sources
Mnweni River
Winterton
Cathedral Peak
DRAKENSBERG
Little uThukela River
Cathkin Peak
Bushman's River
Giant's Castle
1. Royal Natal National Park
2. Upper uThukela Location
3. EKZN Wildlife
4. Drakensberg Location No. 2
5. Drakensberg Location No. 1
6. Giant's Castle Game Reserve

Map of the Drakensberg area

and Tourism, the Department of Arts and Culture (World Heritage legislation of 2005 now administered by that department), KZN Department of Public Works, Ngonyama Trust, and KZN Department of Local Government and Housing. Furthermore, proper planning of the area becomes a trans-boundary issue between South Africa and Lesotho, with the Department of Foreign Affairs coming into the loop! A committee exists to discuss joint management issues, and this has met twice a year for about five years. It is in the process of addressing issues of land ownership, where major confusion still occurs. Some areas listed as World Heritage Site are not part of the Royal Natal National Park or the leased land from the tribal authority, and are essentially unallocated State land.

The Little Berg has many lovely caves with a priceless heritage of Bushman paintings. One after another these caves, which fall within the area administered by the EKZN Wildlife, have had to be fenced in with barbed wire. Others are being left to their fate.

Why must the hand of man despoil all that is beautiful in nature? Why must he leave his litter behind wherever he goes? Not even the creatures of the wild do this. Their environment is never despoiled by their presence. They do not desecrate the ground with their rubbish.

Big business has awoken to the fact that here, in the Drakensberg, is an untapped source of wealth, and the business tycoon is moving in with his deeds of sale. At times he seems completely indifferent to the unspoilt beauty of the mountains.

In July and August of 1972 the Gourton Farmers' Association, seriously alarmed at what was happening in this lovely Cathkin valley, appointed a sub-committee of their Association "to ensure the orderly development of the area". They also approached Percy Fowle, MEC, in charge of local authorities, for advice and help.

Fowle ordered an immediate investigation by the Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission. The Commission were, to put it mildly, perturbed at what they saw. They found a number of unsightly homes going up. Twenty-hectare plot-holders were forming companies whose shareholders could erect buildings, often quite unsuitable, and far in excess of the one building per 20 ha which the law allowed.

One result of this investigation was the production, in 1976, of the Town and Regional Planning Commission's "Drakensberg Policy Statement", by A.J. Phelan. It was adopted by the Commission as its official policy and was accepted by the Standing Subsidiary Committee of the very influential (former) Prime Minister's Planning Advisory Council. But its provisions were only advisory. A second result was the proclamation, in 1974, of 3 000 ha of the Cathkin valley as a Regulated Area.

Let me explain. I am not against the opening up of the Drakensberg. I would like to see more people coming to this lovely area, not less. But it must be a controlled and an orderly coming: it must be planned. And the hills and the valleys must retain their natural charm and beauty, and not be despoiled. Above all, this mountain region must, as far as possible, belong to the nation and not to any private individual.

Maurice Sweeney once pointed out that the Swiss and Austrian mountains have far more people living in them than our Drakensberg valleys. "And yet," he says, "they don't appear to make the place look unpleasant. In fact they add to it. The hand of man lies comparatively lightly on those valleys." This is also true of the woods, lakes and mountains of Scandinavia, where regulations govern development in such a way as to retain wilderness without excluding people or homes. We in South Africa have much to learn in this respect. We have no need to fear the presence of people in our wild places. What we have to watch is our attitude to these wild places and our reaction to the efforts of those in authority to maintain the integrity of the wilds. Sweeney could not have put it better — that the hand of man might lie lightly on our own Drakensberg![1]

The KwaZulu-Natal South Coast was at one time a paradise of golden beaches, blue seas, graceful trees and rich green coastal bush. Today its seas are polluted, its beaches are strewn with rubbish, the lovely coastal bush has gone, and the whole area, from Durban to Margate and beyond, is an unsightly sprawl of houses. Not a single lagoon remains where fish can breed. Do we want the same sort of thing in our Drakensberg mountains?

One overriding fact emerges from all this: there is no uniform control over the Drakensberg, no common policy, no statutory body which can plan, and guide, and protect this mountain region, and ensure that it remains for all time in its natural beauty.

And it is not only the Drakensberg which is at stake. The whole vast uThukela Basin project will be imperilled if nothing is done. The two are interlocked. The Basin depends on the Drakensberg for its very life-blood, its water supplies, which come entirely from the area we are considering. If these supplies are endangered, the whole vast potential of the uThukela Basin is in jeopardy.

This Basin, some 29 000 km^2, is bounded on the west by the Drakensberg Range. The main river of the area is the uThukela, and this is fed by innumerable streams which have their birthplace in the cloud-capped peaks of the Drakensberg mountains — the Buffalo, the Klip, the uThukela, the ubuSingatha, the Mnweni, the uMlambonje (the last two carry more water than the uThukela), the uMhlwazini, the Little uThukela, the Bushman's and the Mooi, to say nothing of those further south.

Already incalculable damage has been done to these water supplies. Writer after writer among the early settlers in Natal speaks of the lovely streams of the Natal Midlands, and remarks on their clarity. You will not find these clear streams today. But what you will find is muddy torrents in summer, carrying millions of kilograms of silt with them, and in winter miserable little trickles of dirty water. Many have disappeared altogether.

Fundamental to the whole uThukela Basin scheme is the preservation and control of these water supplies. And preservation must start in the Drakensberg. When it is realised that the Government spent vasts sums of money on a plan to pump water from the uThukela Basin into the Free State, and to redeposit it in the Vaal Basin to help feed the vast Witwatersrand complex, then the problem becomes one of national importance, affecting the economy of the whole land.

Even this is not the whole story, for the giant Ox-bow scheme, on the Lesotho side of the Drakensberg, is also dependent on the streams of the Drakensberg. But as far as I am aware no efforts are being made in Lesotho to protect these streams and the land between the future Ox-bow Lake and the Drakensberg watershed. The Basotho are herding their cattle there, and are ploughing and ripping up the land.

Because of divided control over the Drakensberg areas, there was no uniform policy for the conservation and allocation of these water supplies. Worse still, a glance at the map opposite will show that three large KwaZulu areas, Drakensberg Location No. 1, Drakensberg Location No. 2, and the Upper uThukela Location, not only sat astride the headwaters of most of the rivers feeding the basin, but one of them, the Upper uThukela Location, actually stretched right up to the summit peaks of the Drakensberg. Any scheme for the uniform control of the Drakensberg areas had to take account of these three areas.

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[1] In Argentina's Nahuel Haupi National Park, Swiss Alpine architecture is obligatory for all houses.

None of these were traditional Zulu homelands. They were the artificial creation of the white man. And, because of the white man's thoughtlessness and failure to look ahead into the future, thousands of people live in these areas. Not only are they hopelessly overcrowded, there is a huge animal population and gross over-utilisation of the veld.

Today there is the most appalling erosion in these areas. The land is serrated and seamed with huge dongas, there is bad sheet erosion especially on the hillsides, and there are huge areas where the ground has turned sour and where grass no longer grows. The effect of all this on the water supplies emanating from the Drakensberg is tragic.

For the sake of these Drakensberg areas, for the sake of the people living not only in the uThukela Basin, but in the whole of South Africa, it is surely imperative that a solution be found to the problem, and that this whole area be guarded and placed in responsible hands for all time.

For far too long little was done towards achieving some form of uniform control over the whole of the Drakensberg area. Until the end of 1986 (when more than 250 000 ha of Forestry Department land was incorporated into the Parks Board) from Giants Castle to Mont-aux-Sources was controlled by three different bodies — Natal Parks Board, Department of Forestry and the KwaZulu Government. There are two further complications. Pushing in, at the Cathedral Peak and Cathkin-Champagne areas, are the spearheads of private enterprise, while much of the summit area is part of Lesotho.

This all meant there was no common policy. Policies differed on soil conservation, burning of the veld, attitudes towards tourism, camping facilities, game preservation, afforestation, conservation of water supplies, while private enterprise all too often was being allowed to despoil the countryside, erect unsuitable dwellings, cause soil erosion, introduce alien vegetation, and cancel rights of way.

Efforts had been made in the past to solve the problem, but it was a story of halfhearted measures and Government procrastination. In 1962 the Department of Agricultural Technical Services decided that all land in the Drakensberg Catchment area should belong to the State, and that every effort should be made to buy out all privately owned land within the ensuing five years. Land bought in this way was to be handed over either to the Natal Parks Board or to the Department of Forestry. In 1963 and 1964 land to the extent of 12 534 ha, was bought, but this was mostly in the area south of Giant's Castle. Subsequent to this decision, however, private individuals were allowed to buy land in the area, notably 365 ha in the Cathkin area by one man, and Solitude in the Injisuthi area by another. The former was cut up into 50-acre stands and resold to private individuals. The latter was developed, admittedly into a very fine nature reserve, by a dedicated conservationist. After that various efforts were made to bring order out of chaos.

At a meeting of the Prime Minister's Resources and Planning Advisory Council on 2 October 1967, Dr P.W. Vorster, Secretary for Agricultural Technical Services, submitted a Memorandum on the Drakensberg to the Council in which he deplored the lack of planning.

The Council decided to appoint a subsidiary committee to investigate the whole problem and to make recommendations. In 1970 this committee produced its report, entitled "A Guide Plan for the Optimum Utilization of the Natural Resources of the Drakensberg Catchment Reserve".

This was a useful document, though the committee did report in favour of "chalet" schemes (admitting, however, that the stringing of chalets along the approach roads to the Drakensberg should cease). But they also reported in favour of a cableway to the summit of a Drakensberg peak! Even worse, they advocated the floodlighting of some of the peaks! They also turned down the suggestion of any form of uniform control over the whole area.

The report was immediately relegated to a convenient pigeonhole in Pretoria, and promptly forgotten. It was only by chance, and through the kind offices of a friend, that I came across it.

I believe the committee was wrong in voting against any system of uniform control. If it can be done in America (vide the Tenessee Valley Authority), it can be done here.

A giant step forward was taken on 15 May 1973, when S.P. Botha, Minister of Forestry, proclaimed two Wilderness Areas in the Drakensberg, the first to be proclaimed in South Africa. These were the Mdedelelo Wilderness Area, stretching from the Didima River in the Cathedral area to Giant's Castle, and the emKhomazi Wilderness Area, from Giant's Castle to Sani Pass.

On 19 May 1989, two new large areas were added to these two Wilderness Areas by G.J. Kotze, Minister of Environmental Affairs. These were the uMlambonje Wilderness Area (270 ha) in the Cathedral area, and includes the mountain peaks Cathedral Peak, the Bell and Cleft Peak, and the addition of a further 7 555 ha to the emKhomazi Wilderness Area.

Mr Gert Kotzé, Minister of Environmental Affairs (left), Mr Dering Stainbank, Chairman of the Natal Parks Board (right) and Dr George Hughes, Director, N.P.B. at Highmoor, on the occasion of the proclamation of the new Wilderness Areas on 19 May 1989. Giant's Castle is in the background Natal Mercury

In July 1974 the Cathkin valley was proclaimed a Regulated Area, under the control of the Development and Services Board, a subsidiary of the Natal Provincial Administration. Regulations for the control of the area were Gazetted in December 1980, but these met with considerable opposition by local residents, and had to be withdrawn and redrafted. They were finally promulgated in 1986.

In 1976 the Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission brought out their "Drakensberg Policy Statement". This was an excellent document. It first of all divided the whole of the Berg area, especially the Cathkin area, into four clearly defined zones, each demarcated according to the natural gradient of the land.

First came the Wilderness Heart Zone, from 3 100 m down to roughly 2 000 m, the almost vertical face of the Drakensberg.

Below that was the second zone, the Landslip Zone, the steep slopes of the Little Berg, a sensitive area where the soil is unstable and landslides often occur, especially if the topsoil is disturbed.

Below this the slopes ease off and we have the lower slopes of the Little Berg. We are now at the 1 372 m level. This is the Trail Zone.

The lowest slope of all, about 8 km wide, is called the Threshold Zone. Here the slope of the land has eased off considerably, and much of it is virtually level.

Regulations were laid down for the use of each of these four zones. Here we can only summarise them. The Wilderness Heart Zone was to remain untouched. No sign whatever of the hand of man was to be seen anywhere there. In the Landslide Zone no roads were to be built and no houses allowed. Trails and hikingway paths were permitted, but these were to be very carefully constructed and maintained. Development in the Trail Zone was to be restricted, the erection of new buildings was to be minimised, and these all had to be of a simple rustic nature. Roads were allowed, but only those that were absolutely necessary.

All future development — hotels, chalets, caravan parks — was to take place in the Threshold Zone, but even here caution was necessary. The statement drew attention to the danger of allowing the population density to outgrow the carrying capacity of the land, which was fragile and sensitive.

This was all excellent.

In 1985 the Central Drakensberg Property Owners' Association (of which I was chairman at the time), greatly concerned at the damage being done to the environment, and at the multiplicity of controls (no less than 10 Government Departments were involved) produced a comprehensive memorandum on the control and development of the Cathkin area in particular, and of the Drakensberg generally. The main recommendations suggested one National Park be created in the Wilderness Heart Zone and the Landslide Zone along the full length of the Drakensberg from Mont-aux-Sources to Bushman's Nek; that a second national park be created on the summit by Lesotho and South Africa, stretching from the escarpment edge some 15 km into Lesotho, from Mont-aux-Sources to Bushman's Nek; and that a single authority be set up to control the Trail Zone and the Threshold Zone.

In 1987 the Natal Town and Regional Planning Commission issued a new statement on the control of the approach areas to the Drakensberg, ancillary to the Policy Statement of 1976. This document defined nodes of development along the length of the Natal Drakensberg, and laid down guidelines for the development of high and low intensity areas.

The declaration of the Drakensberg as a World Heritage Site has brought about some measure of control, some assurances, but there are still many problems unresolved. Those areas outside the park are still under the jurisdiction of too many different bodies with, often, conflicting interests and agendas. Take, for example, the possibility of cableways into the mountains. They are a threat, according to conservationists, who speak of environmental damage to ecological sensitive areas. But according to private enterprise, tribal authorities and some municipalities, they present an opportunity with the promise of jobs and other economic spin-offs.

There have been a few proposals. The Mnweni area was suggested, but a feasibility study showed a lack of viability. However, agitation for a cableway in this area still comes from the local municipality and some tourist organisations. A chairlift to a restaurant has been proposed for the Monk's Cowl/Cathkin Park area, but the strongest candidate for a cableway appears to be from the Sentinel Car Park to west of the Chain Ladder, near Eland Falls. The proposal includes a boutique hotel, lodge and chalets, and a road to Oxbow in Lesotho. In addition to the environmental impact, the road in particular would result in a layer of additional impacts, including more settlement, easier drug smuggling and possibly more intensive livestock grazing.

As Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife controls the area from the edge of the escarpment, it can only say no to cableway or chairlift projects in the area under its jurisdiction. However, if asked as neighbour to the areas where these are proposed or as manager of the World Heritage Site, it would oppose cableways in the Drakensberg. Other than the visual and sense of place impacts, and practical concerns such as ablutions on the top, wind, bad weather, and visitor safety, EKZN Wildlife is particularly concerned about collisions of raptors (especially the Specially Protected and endangered Cape vulture and the Bearded Vulture) with the cables — this is an issue for the Bearded Vulture in the Alps — and the possible disturbance at nesting sites by larger volumes of tourists.

At this stage cableways and chairlifts remain "proposals". Nothing has been decided. However, when the time comes will there come with it the courage needed to withstand political and economic demands for cableways in the Drakensberg — over wilderness areas or even in the World Heritage Site? South Africa has a lamentable record in this regard. Voices of science, of wisdom and of experience have called out in vain as politicians over the past 100 years have signed away our heritage in the name of political expediency.

Man has a deep psychological need to keep in close contact with nature and periodically to renew his spirit. Without this, the quality of life deteriorates. In the face of our population and technological explosion this need is going to grow in the future. It is essential, if we are to preserve our sanity and our integrity, that we strike a balance between the demands of economic development and the deeper demands of man's inner spirit.

I have written this book with one object, and one object only, in mind — to rouse the conscience of my fellow South Africans to what is happening in this mountain region, in the hope that they will say, and say now: "Enough! This must stop! Tomorrow we turn a new page!"

Shortly before he died (it was one of the last things he did) General Smuts wrote an impassioned plea for the preservation of Table Mountain. "To interfere with it," he said, "is to desecrate what should be our national temple, our Holy of Holies. We, as a nation, valuing our unique heritage, should not allow it to be spoiled and despoiled, and should look upon it as among our most sacred possessions, part not only of the soil, but of the soul, of South Africa. For centuries to come, while civilisation lasts on this sub-continent, this national monument should be maintained in all its natural beauty and unique setting. It should be symbolic of our civilisation itself, and it should be our proud tradition to defend it to the limit against all forces of man or nature to disfigure it."

These are noble words. They could have been said, with equal relevance, of our own Drakensberg[1].

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[1] Reg Pearse died in 1995 at the age of 95. Unfortunately he never lived to see his dream of a single, giant uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park come true. The park, totalling 242 813 ha, was declared a World Heritage Site in 1999. It forms part of the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area, and shares its borders with three provinces of South Africa and an international border with Lesotho.

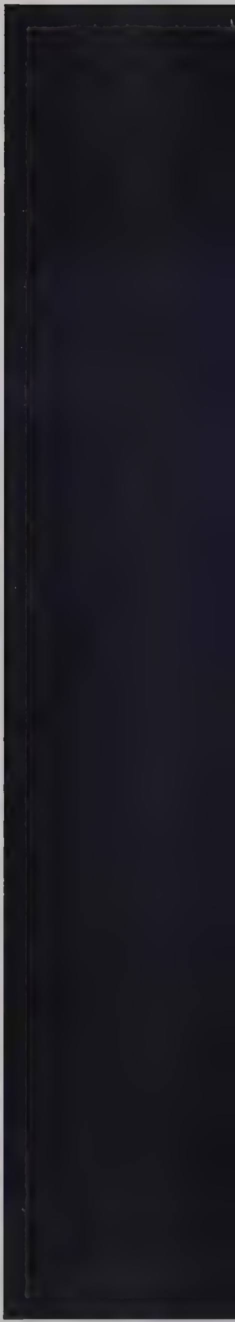
As I sit at my desk writing the last words of a book that took me close on 20 years to complete, and five years to revise and update, I can see, through my study window, the nearer peaks of the Drakensberg, with grand old Cathkin Peak dominating all. The clouds are gathering about its brooding crags, the evening shadows are beginning to drift across its mighty face. My task is done. We have dealt in this book with a multitude of things, with tragedy and high drama, with man's frailty and with his selfless courage. We have watched the climbers as they set their faces towards the high peaks and seen their unquenchable determination in the face of tremendous odds. We have watched the wild game on their mountain slopes, feeding in peace and contentment, we have seen the wild flowers by the wayside. We have looked into the heart of things and found beauty and compassion there, and we have pleaded for the preservation of all this beauty.

Over it all stands the Drakensberg itself, timeless, aloof, inscrutable, but with a wild beauty of its own that tugs at the heartstrings. It is a world of indescribable and ever-changing splendour, a world of basalt giants that stand as sentinels on the roof of South Africa; a world of unspoiled nature, where the cry of the martial eagle breaks the silence of distant peaks, where the thunder roars and winds shriek through lonely crags like dragons in torment; where giant yellowwoods dream away their age-long sleep in hidden valleys, and where man, in all this vast loneliness, can find himself.

Malcolm Pearse

Above: One of the dangers to hikers in the Berg is how suddenly gentle, bubbling streams turn into raging torrents following storms high in the mountains

Right: Fire and fury rent the skies in a typical summer storm in the Drakensberg



Malcolm Pearse

CHAPTER 24

R.O. PEARSE

EDUCATOR, AUTHOR AND MOUNTAINEER

By James Byrom

War clouds, which had been banking up in South Africa during 1899, burst on October 10 with the declaration of war between Great Britain and the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Throughout the early days of October 1899 Boer commandos rode down the mountain passes into Natal, where battles were fought at Talana and Elandslaagte. As the invaders moved slowly but relentlessly towards Ladysmith a siege was feared for the town. Those civilians who could leave, did so. On November 2 the last train steamed out of the town under fire from Boer rifles, carrying among its passengers Frederick Pearse, a lawyer who practised in Ladysmith, and his pregnant wife, Sarah. They were expecting their first child, and Frederick wisely feared for his wife giving birth and for the safety and health of a baby born under siege conditions.

Reginald Oliver Pearse was born in Pietermaritzburg on 9 March 1900, a few days after the siege was lifted. Two more children were born in Pietermaritzburg – Frederick Jnr (his full names were Frederick Ralph, and was always known by his second name; he was Uncle Ralph to his nephews and nieces) and Vera Hammersley, who was born in 1905 — before Frederick decided to return to Ladysmith, probably towards the end of 1905. For about two years they lived in a house at 16 Poort Road, which had been used by General White as his headquarters during the siege of Ladysmith.

In 1907 Sarah took her children to England for a visit, where Reg, then only seven, was impressed by the lovely English countryside. On their return to South Africa, Frederick decided to pack up and go to Johannesburg, impelled by some form of strong religious conviction. It went horribly wrong for the family. They were desperately poor in Johannesburg.

R.O. Pearse John Hone

"I can remember living in a house in Bezuidenhout Valley," Reg was to write many years later, "with nothing but packing cases and old paraffin boxes for furniture. We were often hungry, and our father was reduced to driving a baker's van. I celebrated my eighth birthday there, but soon after that we were back in Ladysmith, and I think it must have been at that time that my father decided to establish his own legal business in the town."

From that point things picked up. The law practice flourished, and for a few years the family lived in a house at the top end of Murchison

Street, called “The Gums”. In 1910 they moved to a better house, at the lower end of Lyell Street – number 24, which remained in the family for 45 years.

Reg matriculated at Ladysmith Secondary School in 1917, and at the beginning of 1918 went to Pietermaritzburg to attend Natal University. His five years at university saw him graduate with a B.A. in 1920, Union T.1. Certificate (equivalent to the modern Higher Education Diploma) in June 1922, and M.A. in December of that year. He had originally decided on law, but halfway through the B.A. course, changed direction and decided on teaching. His first posting, under the Natal Education Department, was to Dundee High School, in January 1923. During these years Reg became friends with Alan Paton and Jan Hofmeyr. In his biography of Hofmeyr, Paton wrote that when things got tough Hofmeyr and he would get away to the peace of the mountains with Reg Pearse. They were all members of the Students' Christian Association (SCA).

Reg described the 11 years at Dundee as happy years, during which time he rose to the positions of sportsmaster and vice-principal. He recalled with delight another reason why Dundee was such a happy place for him.

“In my first year at Dundee High School I was Form Master of Std. 8A, and in the class was a pretty little girl called Edith McKenzie, daughter of a local businessman, John McKenzie.

“Actually, this was not the first time I had met her. Over the long weekend of May 30 to June 1, my father had taken my brother and me on a cycling trip to Newcastle and back. We were returning on June 1. I remember the date well, for the Battle of Jutland, in World War 1, had been fought on the previous day, and news was just beginning to trickle through. We stopped at every little Post Office and Railway Station to get the latest news. As we approached Dundee my father said to us: ‘I am now going to take you to meet one of my oldest and best friends, Johnny McKenzie. You'll like him.’ I still have a vivid recollection of meeting the family in their large dining room, the walls lined with a bewildering mass of little boys and girls, 10 of them altogether, ranging in age from a baby of one year to a girl of 16, all with big, round solemn eyes, taking in the three strangers who had dropped in on them. Amongst them was the same little girl, nine years of age then, with sparkling blue eyes and flaxen hair. I little guessed that ten and a half years later I would be proposing to that same little girl on the front verandah, only a few yards away from where I was then sitting! We became engaged in 1926, and were married on 18 December 1928.”

Edith comes from an interesting family. Her mother, May Alexandra Brickhill, was the granddaughter of Ebenezer Buchanan, brother of David Dale Buchanan, founder and first editor of the *Natal Witness*, and a controversial figure in early Natal history. Her father, John McKenzie, was the son of one of Natal's early settlers, John McKenzie (Snr). In 1879 the Natal Government was busy recruiting railway engineers from overseas for the building of the new railway line between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, and John McKenzie responded to the call. He and his wife and young family came out to this country in 1879. They settled first at Congella, but later moved to Estcourt (probably following the railway line as construction moved north from Pietermaritzburg), and it was here that John McKenzie (Jnr), who was born in 1874, met May Alexandra Brickhill. The couple married in 1899. Only a few months after his marriage, he took part in the epic night march of the Natal Carbineers from Dundee to Ladysmith, in October 1899, and served with the troops throughout the siege of Ladysmith. The family later moved to Coalfields, just outside Dundee, and then into Dundee itself, where John McKenzie soon established himself as a keen and progressive estate agent.

From April to July 1933, while on long leave from the Education Department, Reg and Edith toured Central and East Africa by car — a Model T Ford! It was a trip which was to produce Reg's first book, *Empty Highways*, in rather a strange manner. He had written long letters home while they were travelling. On his return he packed them up with a few photographs of the trip and sent them to a publisher in England, asking if the publisher thought the letters interesting enough to form the basis of a book. He heard nothing for many months, and had given up the idea when a large carton, posted in England, was delivered to their home. In it were copies of the book! His letters were fascinating, his language eloquent, the story compelling enough for the publishers to consider what they had was worthy of a book without further need for rewriting. The title page of the book describes the journey as “Ten Thousand Miles by Road and Lake through East and Central Africa”.

After six months as Acting Headmaster at Glencoe Primary School, Reg and Edith left Dundee at the end of 1934 on transfer to Maritzburg College. A year later he was promoted to Headmaster of Newcastle High School, where he spent a little more than five years. In June 1941 he was appointed Headmaster at Estcourt High School. Here he spent the rest of his career in education – more than 24 happy and sometimes very difficult years – before retiring at the end of 1965. It is said that he turned down offers of transfers to headmasterships of other leading Natal schools and an inspectorship, which was to the benefit of many hundreds of pupils who passed through Estcourt High School.

Denis Slaney, who joined the teaching staff at Estcourt High School in 1952, remembers meeting Reg Pearse when he arrived at the school during his first year of teaching.

"I had heard that Mr Pearse, the Headmaster, ran a very 'tight ship', and that members of staff were expected to 'toe the line'. It was, therefore, with some trepidation that I made my way across to his home at mid-day on a Sunday. My reception was polite, though not re-assuring, as he had had no notice of my transfer! I was offered a post in the hostel and agreed to take over my predecessor's time-table.

"It didn't take long for me to realise that the 'Boss' (as he was known by staff and pupils alike) had, in ten years, given his life to three great aims. The most important one was to continue to develop Estcourt High School as a leading co-educational High School in Natal. He gave excellent personal leadership in building a fine school spirit amongst staff and pupils. For years he took the matric class for English. As a result of the academic progress throughout, the pupils achieved excellent results in both the Junior and Senior Certificate examinations.

"The boarding staff was encouraged to carry out their duties conscientiously, firmly and with understanding. As the boarders comprised more than half of the total pupil numbers, this section played a major role in developing a positive school spirit. Extramurally, he gave full support to all the major fixtures at home, while often attending inter-school meetings in Northern Natal, for example, cadet band competitions and athletic meetings. He was keenly interested in dramatics, and took the senior debating meetings for some years.

"At the same time he gave his energy and effort to the development of the school property. In the early 1950s he persuaded the Natal Education Department to construct a third hostel. The swimming bath at the school was rather small for the growing numbers using it. The pool was almost doubled in size and a filtration plant installed. The cricket and athletic field, known later as the R.O. Pearse Field, was developed, and two rugby and two hockey fields followed. His greatest achievement was the founding of the School Memorial Hall. The first step was to persuade the local authorities to close the main road to Loskop, which divided the school from the playing fields. It was on this site that the hall was opened in 1957, for morning assembly, prize-giving ceremonies, plays, Sunday evening hour — in fact, the hub of the school. While the Department contributed large financial assistance, the special features of the hall came from the school's efforts. Assisted by the financial capabilities of his vice-principal, Mike Lindsay, fund raising included the organisation of fetes — staff and pupils working with parents, local farmers and businessmen. Mrs. Edith Pearse, early on, made her contribution by running the tuck shop, during breaks, from a very small room off the quadrangle.

"Mr. Pearse's third great objective was his love of the Drakensberg. He must have spent many happy days in the 'Berg, as this book shows.

"Mr Pearse made a great success of his life. He set the highest principles and, by his example, encouraged so many to endeavour to do the same. No one could have made better use of his resources than he did. As the Headmaster of Estcourt High School he was the greatest. As a person he was a splendid example.

"May his memory be cherished in *Barrier of Spears*."

Early in 1961 Reg and Edith bought a six-hectare plot in the Drakensberg, near Champagne Castle Hotel, and here they built their home *Emkhizweni*, the "*Place of the Misty Rain*", and it was to here they came to enjoy their retirement. And it was here that Reg Pearse began working on a history of the Drakensberg mountains, the High Berg from Royal Natal National Park to Giant's Castle. It was a book that has become a South African classic — but it came close to never seeing the light of publication. He threw it in the dustbin after getting it back from a publisher — rejected! Fortunately it was retrieved by John Tungay, one of the founders of the Drakensberg Boys' Choir School, who read it and persuaded Reg to persist with it. And so it was that one of the great South African best-sellers was saved!

It was Reg Pearse's third book. The first two were *Empty Highways* (Blackwood, 1935), mentioned earlier, and the second was *Sable and Murrey* (Shuter & Shooter, 1946), the history of Estcourt High School. After *Barrier of Spears* (Howard Timmins, 1973) came *Mountain Splendour* (Howard Timmins, 1978), a magnificent book on the flowers of the Drakensberg.

I had done some research for Reg for *Barrier of Spears*, and we kept in touch. He wrote to me in June 1979, asking me to call and see him when I was next in the Drakensberg as he had an idea for a new book, a book in which he offered me a joint authorship if I did the research. It was a task I accepted with enthusiasm, and while I was busy gathering the information necessary for the book, he took the time to write *Joseph Baynes, Pioneer* (Shuter & Shooter, 1981), being the life and times of one of Natal's leading agriculturalists and politicians prior to Union. For this Reg was awarded the Lady Usher Prize for Literature. The book we planned together was *Dragon's Wrath* (Macmillan South Africa, 1981), a book about the triumphs, tragedies, mysteries and dramas of the Drakensberg. After its publication, Reg was asked to do a new edition of *Barrier of Spears*. He agreed on condition I helped him, and in December 1989 a new, revised and illustrated edition of *Barrier of Spears* was published (Southern Book Publishers). This book was illustrated with the truly magnificent photographs by his son, Malcolm Pearse.

In addition to the Lady Usher award, Reg Pearse was awarded Civic Honours by Estcourt Municipality, the first person to have received such an honour. He was also the recipient of a State President's Award and was honoured by the Drakensberg Property Owners' Association and the Drakensberg Resorts' Association. His contribution to the understanding of the Drakensberg mountains, their beauty, ecological sensitivity, and the need for their preservation, was described in an illuminated address by these organizations as being "unequalled by any other man".

He may have been small in stature, but he was inordinately strong — both in willpower and in his ability to endure a spartan existence. He celebrated his 81st birthday by climbing Sterkhorn with his son, Malcolm, and grandson, 11-year-old Andrew. He was near 90 when asked why he was planting a sapling a few centimeters high. His reply: "To rest under in my old age!" And he was 90 when doctors forbade his taking his traditional morning cold water plunge (yes, even in winter!)

Reg is survived by his three children, Muriel, Joan, and Malcolm.

What made Reg Pearse so special? One was struck by the humility of this deeply religious man. He boasted not about his achievements, but with deep conviction and rare humility believed he had been privileged to have achieved the things he achieved.

Of course, his life's journey was with the support and encouragement of Edith — his "Chum" — with her impish sense of humour and twinkling blue eyes.

Edith Pearse

Edith ran the tuck shop in the years I was a pupil at Estcourt High School, and I remember her no-nonsense attitude to good manners and good behaviour at all times by the pupils. We knew, too, that there were times she spoke to the Boss on our behalf. A hint to her that a Saturday evening dance would be appreciated, would be followed by an announcement of a dance. A quiet word of thanks to Edith later would be met with a straight-faced assurance that the idea had been the Boss's. Years later we laughed together about these occasions.

Not long after their 60th anniversary Edith became seriously ill. Reg took care of her at home until her death on 24 October 1992. Reg had an everlasting love affair with Edith in a marriage that was filled with humour and warmth, and when she died the spark seemed to go out of his life. He never wrote again.

One should not pass up this opportunity to record with gratitude the love and care given to Edith and Reg by the people in the district. Every day during the last couple of years, bread and milk and hot meals were delivered to their home by hotels in the area. Individuals went out of their way to do other tasks, such as nursing assistance for Edith, collecting and delivering post, and calling regularly to make sure that all was well at Emkhizweni. If anybody was going into Estcourt, the nearest large centre, Reg and Edith would always be asked if there was anything they needed from town.

When Reg sat down to write the words came quickly. He did not

Reg Pearse in his study at Emkhizweni John Hone

struggle, as I frequently do, to find that special word, that turn of phrase that captures the soul of what one is trying to convey. There is no copyright on facts, and the stories are there for every writer of non-fiction. *Barrier of Spears* has endured not so much for the stories it contains as for the manner in which they were written. His is a clear, uncluttered prose which carries his readers to infinite pleasure with simple, uncomplicated words.

Reg's powers of concentration were supreme, and remained so until the end of his life. I sent him a copy of the manuscript of my book *Fields of Air.* A few days later he left his home in the Drakensberg to travel to Johannesburg where he underwent surgery. While he was away, his neighbour and fellow author, Alex Willcox, was shot and killed, and it was felt that Reg should not return and live alone in the mountains. About three months later I called on him in Johannesburg, and he apologised that he had left my manuscript in the Berg. He then proceeded to give me a detailed and incisive critique of a manuscript he hadn't seen for nearly four months. That was in 1993, when he was 93 years old. He was conceding his age in failing hearing and a weakness in the knees, but he remained a mental giant until the very end. He died in 1995 — just a few weeks after his 95th birthday.

As one looks back on the life of an achiever, one recognises qualities that were the engine of success, the motor drive of the personality. When one reaches a peak there can be two courses for the future. It could be that one can only see the future as downhill after the peak. Or one can look out and see new horizons, new destinations and new challenges. This latter option is the one Reg saw when the time came to leave the peak he had reached as a school principal. One is struck by the energy Reg must have had — and the strength of character to see through to the end the tasks begun, to successfully conquer the personal peaks set by the imagination.

Reg Pearse retired from teaching, and embarked on another career as an author — and it will probably be the second career, much of it centered on his love for the Drakensberg, for which he will be better remembered.

iNtunja

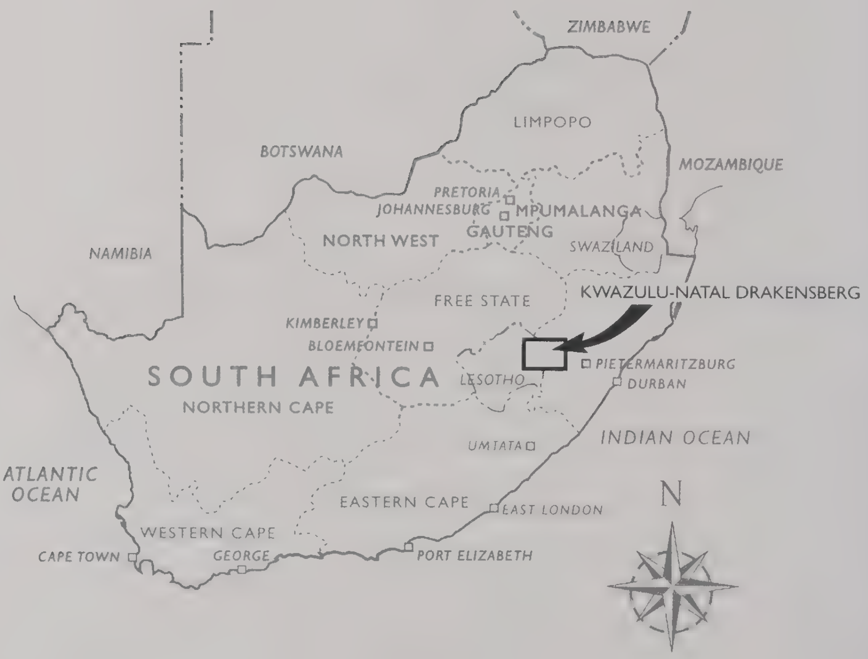
Strange muted colours illuminate the sky as another day draws to a close

Malcolm Pearse

MAPS

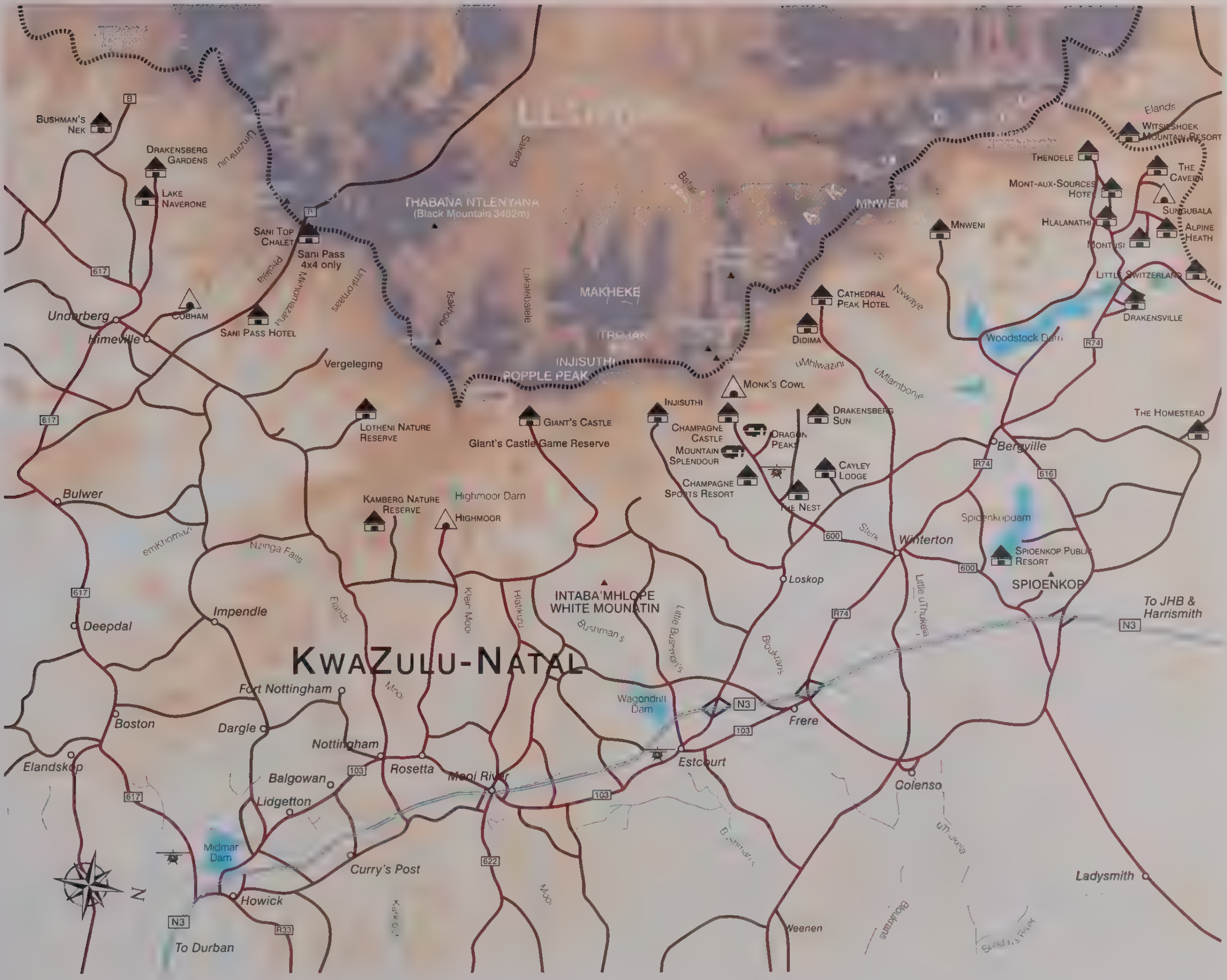
ALTITUDE (m)	
🟪	3400+
🟪	3300+
🟪	3200+
🟪	3100+
🟪	3000+
🟪	2900+
🟪	2800+
🟪	2700+
🟫	2600+
🟫	2500+
🟫	2400+
🟧	2300+
🟧	2200+
🟧	2100+
🟧	2000+
🟧	1900+
🟧	1800+
🟧	1700+
🟨	1600+
🟨	1500+
🟨	1400+
🟨	1300+
⬜	1200+
⬜	900+

KEY	
⌂	Hotel/ Resort/ Hutted Camp
△	Campsite
🚐	Caravan Park
⌂	Hut
△	Recommended hike stop point
✈	Landing Strip
◠	Cave
⊼	Picnic Site
ⓘ	Information
👁	Scenic View
⊤	Boom Gate
⊠	Gate Closed
P	Parking
B	Border Post
▨	Forested Area
—	River
═	Freeway
—	Tar Roads
—	Dirt/ Gravel Roads
—	Footpaths
	Indistinct path/ route


ZIMBABWE
LIMPOPO
BOTSWANA
MOZAMBIQUE
PRETORIA
JOHANNESBURG
MPUMALANGA
GAUTENG
NORTH WEST
NAMIBIA
SWAZILAND
FREE STATE
KWAZULU-NATAL DRAKENSBERG
KIMBERLEY
BLOEMFONTEIN
SOUTH AFRICA
LESOTHO
PIETERMARITZBURG
DURBAN
NORTHERN CAPE
INDIAN OCEAN
UMTATA
ATLANTIC OCEAN
EASTERN CAPE
EAST LONDON
N
WESTERN CAPE
CAPE TOWN
GEORGE
PORT ELIZABETH

Important: All maps are intended as rough guides

Please refer to official contour maps available at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife offices before setting out on any serious hike


LESOTHO
THABANA NTLENYANA
(Black Mountain 3482m)
MAKHEKE
INJISUTHI
POPPLE PEAK
MNWENI
KWAZULU-NATAL
Bushman's Nek
Drakensberg Gardens
Lake Naverone
Sani Top Chalet
Sani Pass 4x4 only
Cobham
Sani Pass Hotel
Underberg
Himeville
Vergeleging
Lotheni Nature Reserve
Giant's Castle
Giant's Castle Game Reserve
Kamberg Nature Reserve
Highmoor Dam
Highmoor
Injisuthi
Monk's Cowl
Champagne Castle
Mountain Splendour
Dragon Peaks
Champagne Sports Resort
The Nest
Cayley Lodge
Drakensberg Sun
Didima
Cathedral Peak Hotel
Mnweni
Thendele
Witsieshoek Mountain Resort
The Cavern
Mont-aux-Sources Hotel
Sungubala
Hlalanathi
Alpine Heath
Montusi
Little Switzerland
Drakensville
Woodstock Dam
The Homestead
Bergville
Spioenkopdam
Spioenkop Public Resort
SPIOENKOP
Winterton
Loskop
INTABA'MHLOPE
WHITE MOUNTAIN
To JHB & Harrismith
Bulwer
Deepdal
Impendle
Fort Nottingham
Boston
Dargle
Nottingham
Elandskop
Balgowan
Rosetta
Mooi River
Lidgetton
Midmar Dam
Curry's Post
Howick
To Durban
Wagendrift Dam
Estcourt
Frere
Colenso
Ladysmith
Weenen
Elands
Sakeng
Bafali
Tsakholo
Lakalebalele
uMhlwazini
uMlambonje
Nwaye
Umzimkhulu
Pholela
Mkhomazana
Umkomaas
emKhomazi
Nzinga Falls
Elands
Klein Mooi
Hlatikulu
Mooi
Bushman's
Little Bushman's
Bloukrans
Sterk
Little uThukela
uThukela
Bushman's
Bloukrans
Sundays River
Mooi
Karkloof
N
B
R
617
617
617
617
103
103
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R33
R74
R74
R74
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600
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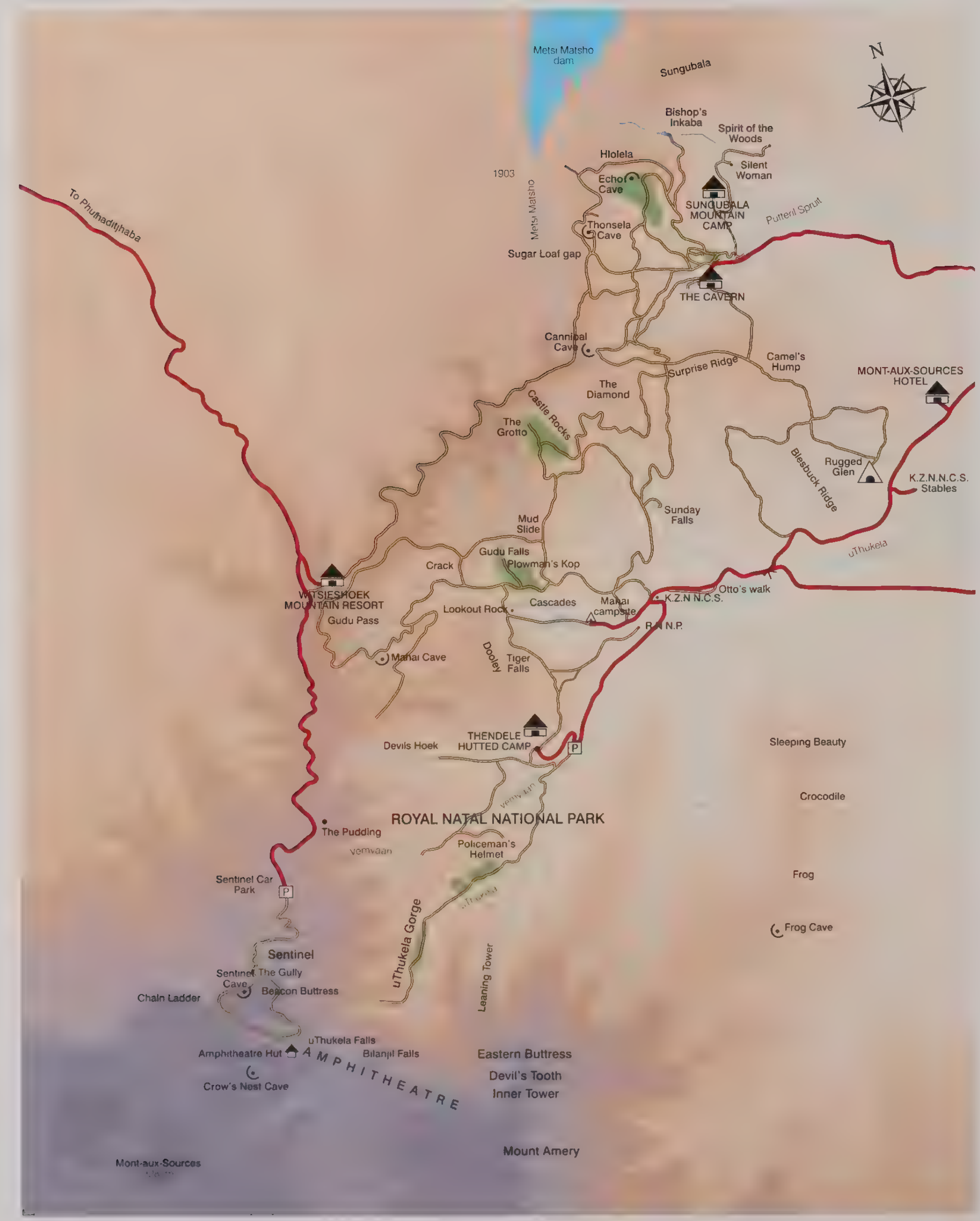
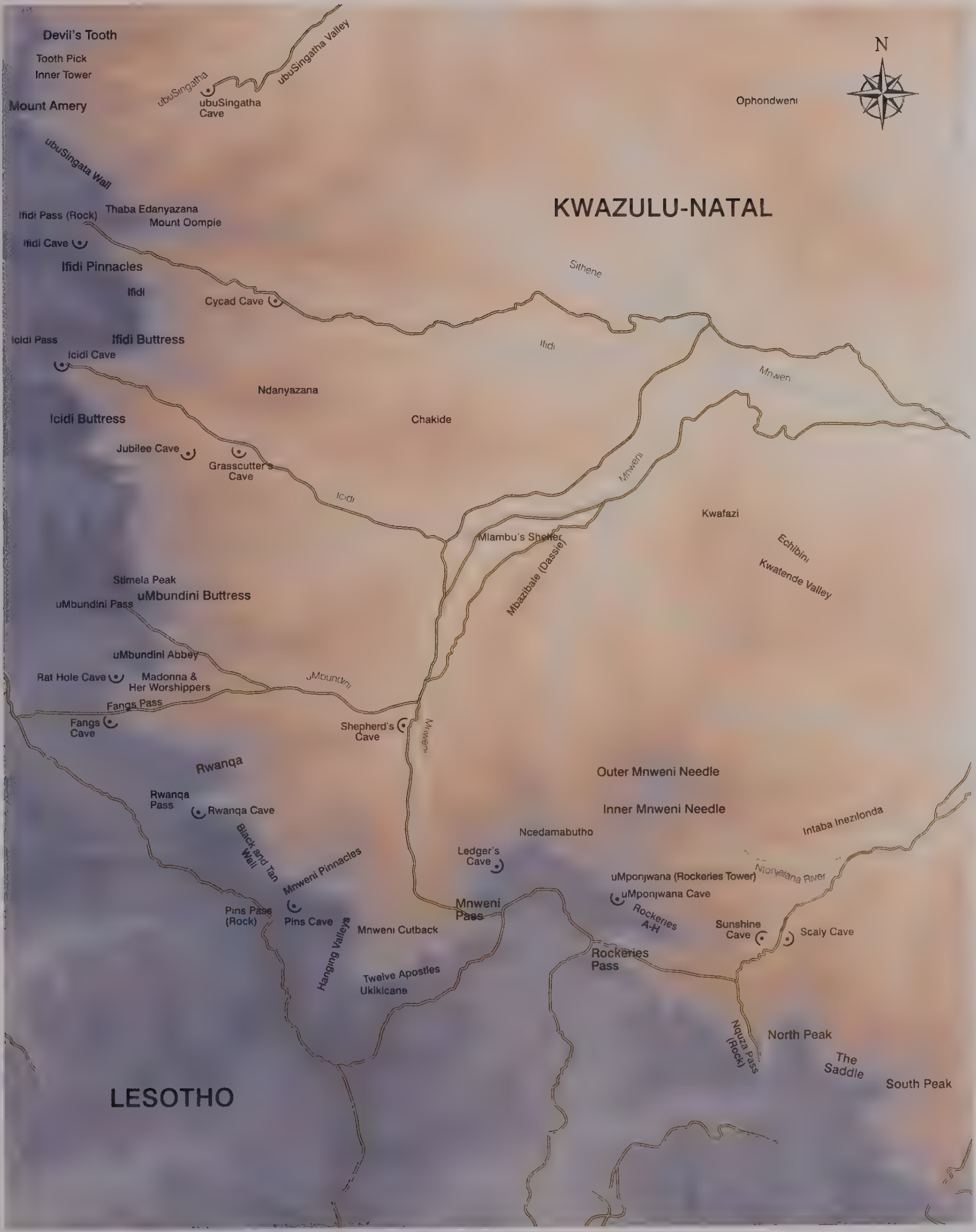
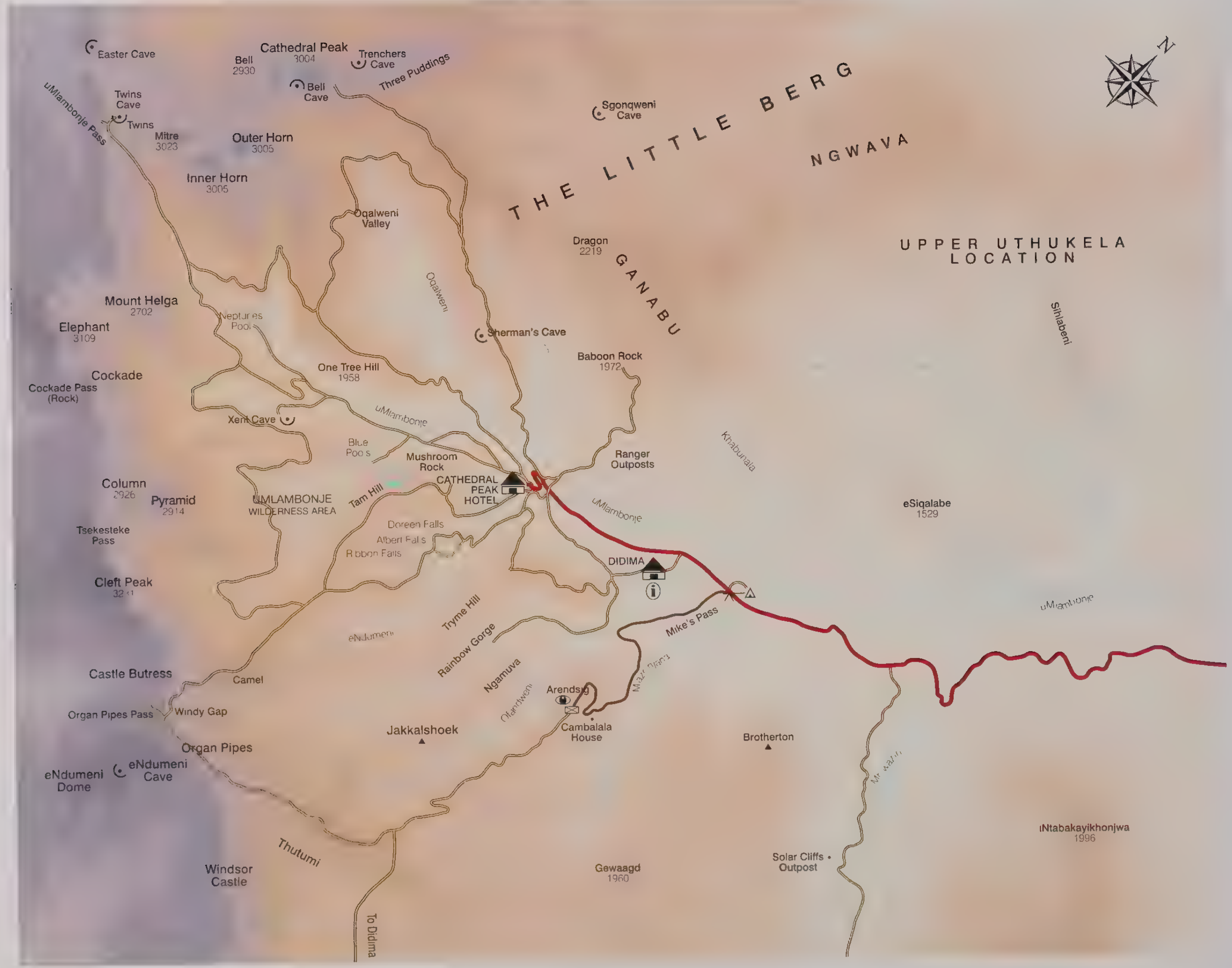

N
Metsi Matsho dam
Sungubala
Bishop's Inkaba
Spirit of the Woods
Silent Woman
Hlolela
1903
Echo Cave
Metsi Matsho
Thonsela Cave
SUNGUBALA MOUNTAIN CAMP
Putterill Spruit
Sugar Loaf gap
THE CAVERN
To Phuthaditjhaba
Cannibal Cave
Surprise Ridge
Camel's Hump
MONT-AUX-SOURCES HOTEL
The Diamond
Castle Rocks
The Grotto
Blesbuck Ridge
Rugged Glen
K.Z.N.N.C.S. Stables
Sunday Falls
Mud Slide
Gudu Falls
Plowman's Kop
Crack
uThukela
Otto's walk
WITSIESHOEK MOUNTAIN RESORT
Gudu Pass
Lookout Rock
Cascades
Mahai campsite
K.Z.N.N.C.S.
R.N.N.P.
Mahai Cave
Dooley
Tiger Falls
THENDELE HUTTED CAMP
Devils Hoek
P
Sleeping Beauty
Crocodile
ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK
The Pudding
Vemvaan
Policeman's Helmet
Frog
Sentinel Car Park
P
Frog Cave
Sentinel
Sentinel Cave
The Gully
Beacon Buttress
Chain Ladder
uThukela Gorge
Leaning Tower
uThukela Falls
Amphitheatre Hut
Bilanjil Falls
Eastern Buttress
Devil's Tooth
Inner Tower
Crow's Nest Cave
AMPHITHEATRE
Mount Amery
Mont-aux-Sources

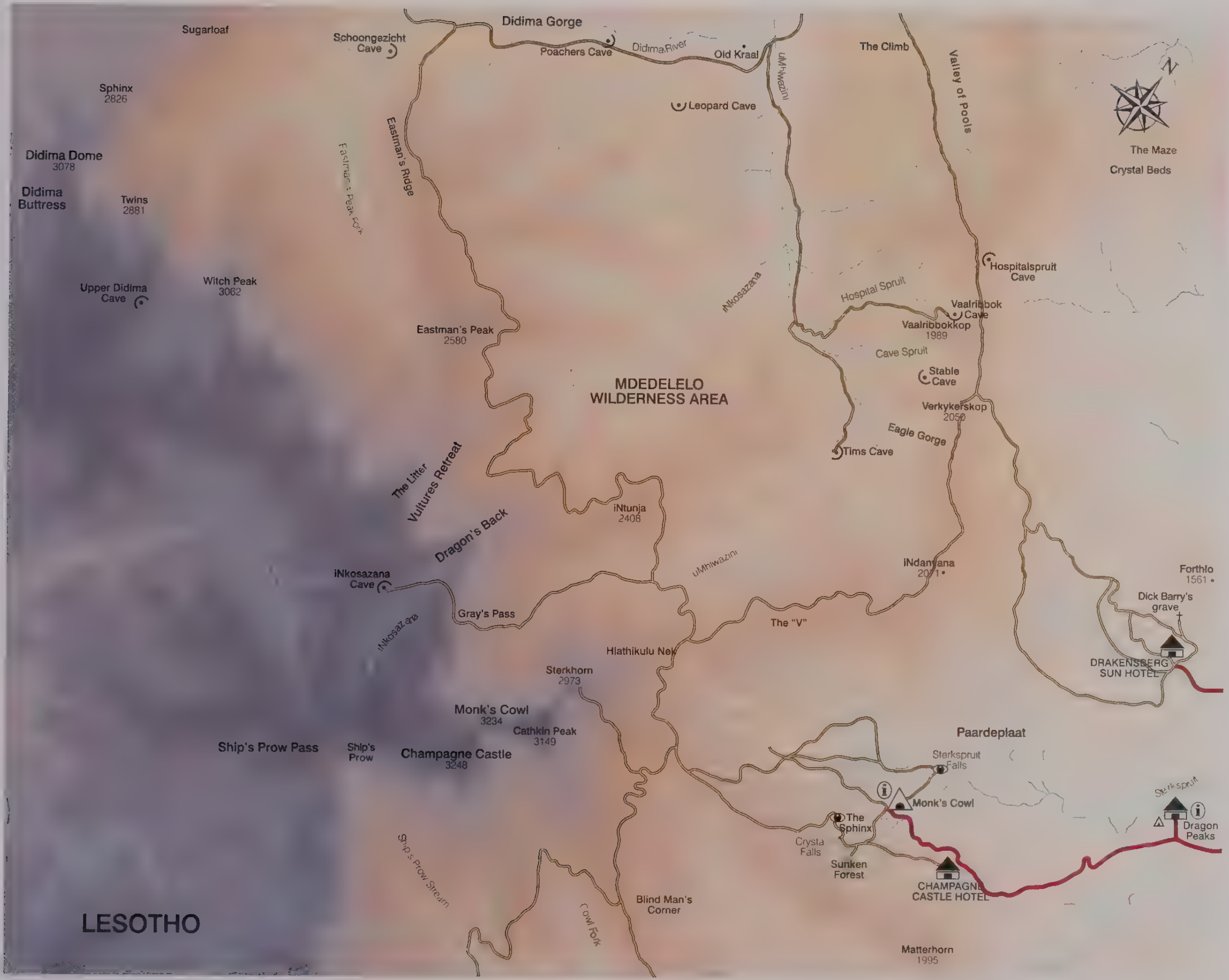
MONT-AUX-SOURCES AREA


N
Devil's Tooth
Tooth Pick
Inner Tower
Mount Amery
ubuSingatha
ubuSingatha Cave
ubuSingatha Valley
Ophondweni
ubuSingata Wall
KWAZULU-NATAL
Ifidi Pass (Rock)
Thaba Edanyazana
Mount Oompie
Ifidi Cave
Ifidi Pinnacles
Ifidi
Sithene
Cycad Cave
Icidi Pass
Ifidi Buttress
Icidi Cave
Ifidi
Mnweni
Ndanyazana
Chakide
Icidi Buttress
Jubilee Cave
Grasscutter's Cave
Icidi
Mnweni
Kwafazi
Mlambu's Shelter
Echibini
Mbazibale (Dassie)
Kwatende Valley
Stimela Peak
uMbundini Buttress
uMbundini Pass
uMbundini Abbey
Rat Hole Cave
Madonna & Her Worshippers
uMbundini
Fangs Pass
Fangs Cave
Shepherd's Cave
Mnweni
Rwanqa
Outer Mnweni Needle
Rwanqa Pass
Rwanqa Cave
Inner Mnweni Needle
Black and Tan Wall
Ncedamabutho
Intaba Inezilonda
Ledger's Cave
Mnweni Pinnacles
uMponjwana (Rockeries Tower)
Ntonjelana River
uMponjwana Cave
Mnweni Pass
Rockeries A-H
Pins Pass (Rock)
Pins Cave
Mnweni Cutback
Sunshine Cave
Scaly Cave
Hanging Valleys
Rockeries Pass
Twelve Apostles
Ukikicane
Nquza Pass (Rock)
North Peak
The Saddle
South Peak
LESOTHO

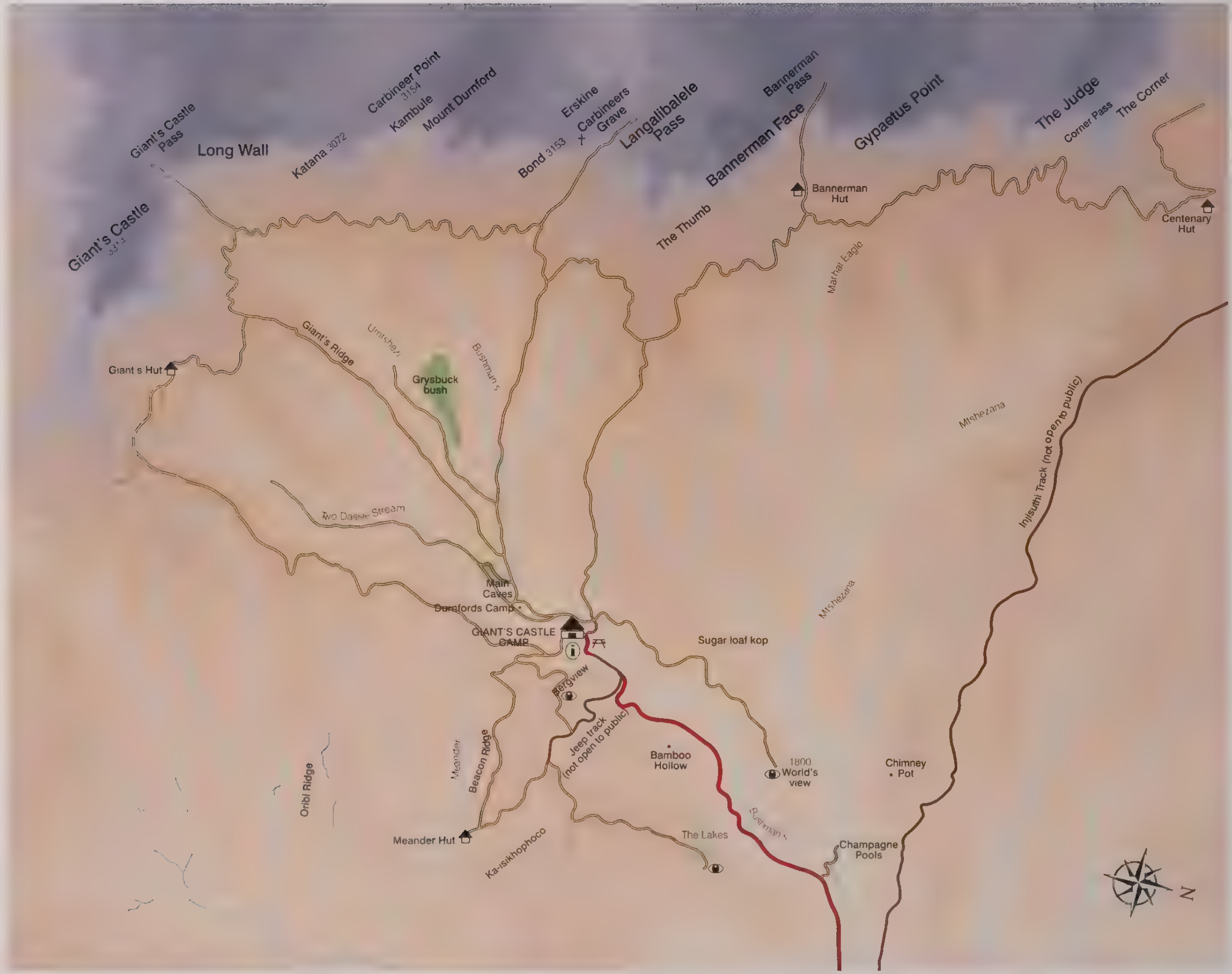
Mnweni Area


Easter Cave
Cathedral Peak
3004
Bell
2930
Trenchers
Cave
Three Puddings
Bell
Cave
Twins
Cave
Twins
uMlambonje Pass
Mitre
3023
Outer Horn
3005
Inner Horn
3005
THE LITTLE BERG
NGWAVA
Sgonqweni
Cave
Qqalweni
Valley
Qqalweni
Dragon
2219
GANABU
UPPER UTHUKELA
LOCATION
Sihlabeni
Mount Helga
2702
Elephant
3109
Neptunes
Pool
Sherman's Cave
Baboon Rock
1972
One Tree Hill
1958
Cockade
Cockade Pass
(Rock)
Xeni Cave
uMlambonje
Blue
Pools
Mushroom
Rock
Ranger
Outposts
Khabunala
CATHEDRAL
PEAK
HOTEL
Tarn Hill
Column
2926
Pyramid
2914
UMLAMBONJE
WILDERNESS AREA
uMlambonje
eSiqalabe
1529
Tsekesteke
Pass
Doreen Falls
Albert Falls
Ribbon Falls
DIDIMA
Cleft Peak
3281
uMlambonje
Tryme Hill
eNdumeni
Mike's Pass
Rainbow Gorge
Castle Butress
Camel
Ngamuva
Arendsig
Organ Pipes Pass
Windy Gap
Cambalala
House
Jakkalshoek
Brotherton
Organ Pipes
eNdumeni
Dome
eNdumeni
Cave
iNtabakayikhonjwa
1996
Thutumi
Solar Cliffs
Outpost
Windsor
Castle
Gewaagd
1960
To Didima
N

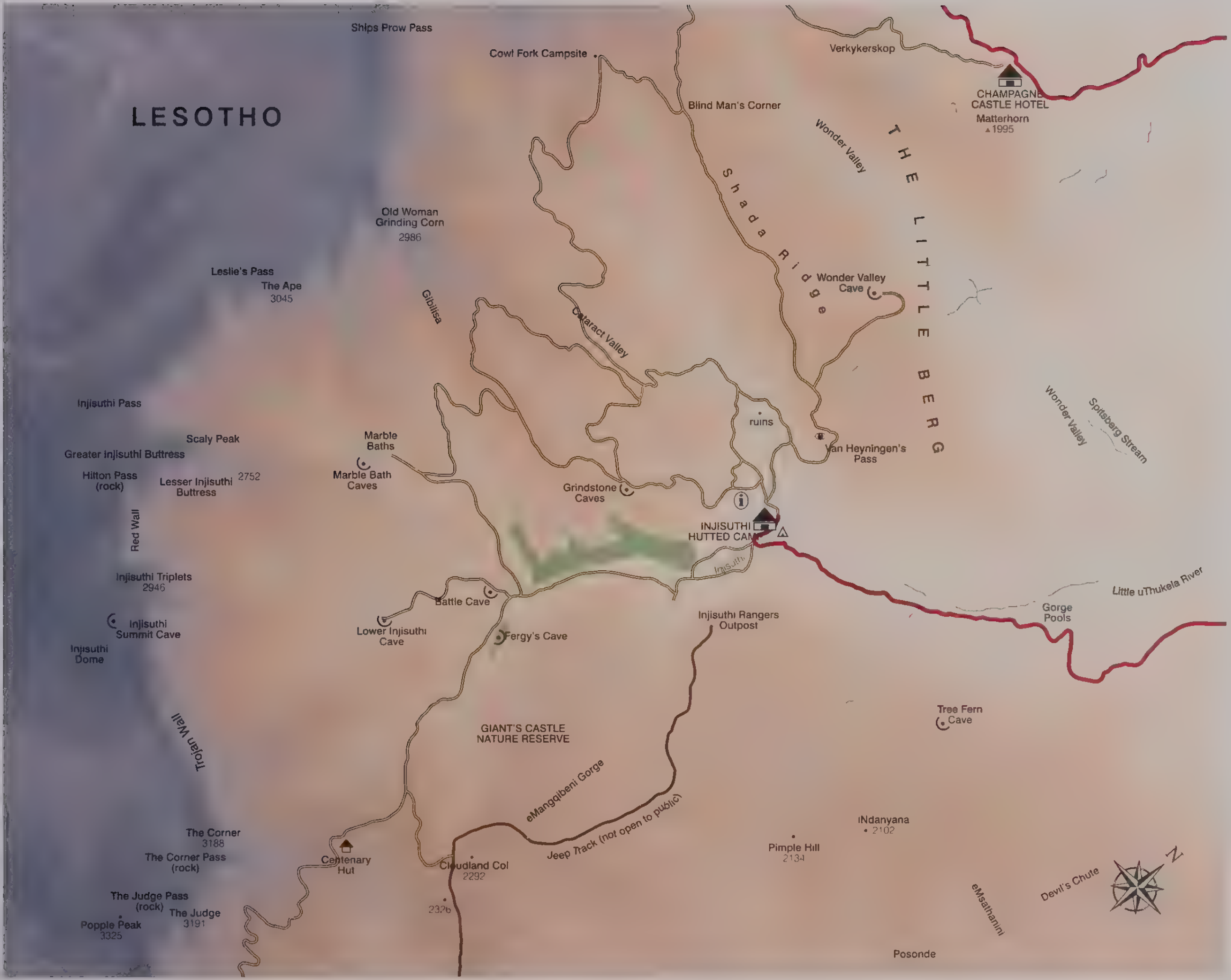
Cathedral Area


Sugarloaf
Schoongezicht Cave
Didima Gorge
Poachers Cave
Didima River
Old Kraal
uMhlwazini
The Climb
Valley of Pools
N
The Maze
Crystal Beds
Sphinx
2826
Leopard Cave
Didima Dome
3078
Eastman's Ridge
Eastman's Peak Fork
Didima Buttress
Twins
2881
Upper Didima Cave
Witch Peak
3062
Hospitalspruit Cave
iNkosazana
Hospital Spruit
Vaalribbok Cave
Eastman's Peak
2580
Vaalribbokkop
1989
Cave Spruit
Stable Cave
MDEDELELO WILDERNESS AREA
Verkykerskop
2050
Eagle Gorge
Tims Cave
The Litter
Vultures Retreat
Dragon's Back
iNtunja
2408
uMhlwazini
iNdanyana
2071
Forthlo
1561
iNkosazana Cave
Dick Barry's grave
Gray's Pass
The "V"
iNkosazana
Hlathikulu Nek
DRAKENSBERG SUN HOTEL
Sterkhorn
2973
Monk's Cowl
3234
Cathkin Peak
3149
Paardeplaat
Ship's Prow Pass
Ship's Prow
Champagne Castle
3248
Sterkspruit Falls
Monk's Cowl
Sterkspruit
The Sphinx
Dragon Peaks
Crystal Falls
Sunken Forest
CHAMPAGNE CASTLE HOTEL
Ship's Prow Stream
Blind Man's Corner
Cowl Fork
LESOTHO
Matterhorn
1995

Cathkin Area


Giant's Castle
3314
Giant's Castle Pass
Long Wall
Katana 3072
Carbineer Point
3154
Kambule
Mount Durnford
Bond 3153
Erskine
Carbineers Grave
Langalibalele Pass
Bannerman Face
Bannerman Pass
Gypaetus Point
The Judge
Corner Pass
The Corner
The Thumb
Bannerman Hut
Centenary Hut
Marhal Eagle
Giant's Hut
Giant's Ridge
Umtshezi
Grysbuck bush
Bushman's
Mtshezana
Injisuthi Track (not open to public)
Two Dassie Stream
Main Caves
Durnfords Camp
GIANT'S CASTLE CAMP
Sugar loaf kop
Mtshezana
Bergview
Jeep track (not open to public)
Bamboo Hollow
1800
World's view
Chimney Pot
Meander
Beacon Ridge
Oribi Ridge
Meander Hut
Ka-isikhophoco
The Lakes
Bushman's
Champagne Pools
N

Giant's Castle Area


Ships Prow Pass
Cowl Fork Campsite
Verkykerskop
CHAMPAGNE CASTLE HOTEL
Matterhorn
1995
LESOTHO
Blind Man's Corner
Wonder Valley
THE LITTLE BERG
Shada Ridge
Old Woman Grinding Corn
2986
Leslie's Pass
The Ape
3045
Gibilisa
Cataract Valley
Wonder Valley Cave
ruins
Van Heyningen's Pass
Wonder Valley
Spitsberg Stream
Injisuthi Pass
Scaly Peak
Greater Injisuthi Buttress
Marble Baths
Marble Bath Caves
Hilton Pass (rock)
Lesser Injisuthi Buttress
2752
Grindstone Caves
INJISUTHI HUTTED CAMP
Red Wall
Injisuthi
Injisuthi Triplets
2946
Battle Cave
Little uThukela River
Gorge Pools
Injisuthi Summit Cave
Lower Injisuthi Cave
Fergy's Cave
Injisuthi Rangers Outpost
Injisuthi Dome
Tree Fern Cave
Trojan Wall
GIANT'S CASTLE NATURE RESERVE
eMangqibeni Gorge
Jeep Track (not open to public)
iNdanyana
2102
The Corner
3188
The Corner Pass (rock)
Centenary Hut
Cloudland Col
2292
Pimple Hill
2134
N
Devil's Chute
The Judge Pass (rock)
The Judge
3191
Popple Peak
3325
2326
eMsalhanini
Posonde

Injisuthi Area

APPENDIX

HEIGHTS OF DRAKENSBERG PEAKS AND RECORD OF FIRST ASCENTS

Most Drakensberg peaks standing on the edge of the escarpment can be climbed either from the summit (Lesotho) plateau, the easy way, or from the Natal side, always a much more difficult task. An asterisk indicates a climb via the summit plateau. All heights are according to the latest survey figures from the Department of Trigonometrical Survey.

PEAK	HEIGHT		DATE OF FIRST ASCENT	CLIMBING PARTY	STANDARD OF CLIMB
	FEET	METRES			
Injisuthi	11 195	3 410		No Record*	A
Champagne Castle	10 650	3 246		via Gray's Pass: no record	B
			1888	Rev A.H. Stocker, F.R. Stocker, via the High Route	D
			1861	Major Grantham (tradionally) but route not known	
Popple Peak	10 929	3 331		No Record	A
Giant's Castle	10 870	3 314	1941	G.M.J. Sweeney and party, via S.E. Gully	C
			1864	Bob Speirs, Augustus Bovill, Henry, Edgar and Fred Bucknall	A
Mont-aux-Sources	10 768	3 282	1836	Rev T. Arbousset and Rev F. Daumas*	A
Cleft Peak	10 752	3 277	1941	D.P. Liebenberg, Else Wong, A.S. Hooper, via Diagonal Route	C
			1946	O.B. Godbold, Mr and Mrs A. Millard, via the cleft	E
			1936	D.P. Liebenberg, Dr L.P. Ripley and party*	A
Monk's Cowl	10 611	3 234	1942	J. Botha, E. Ruhle, A.S. Hooper, H. Wong	F
Ifidi Buttress	10 560	3 219		No record*	A
eNdumeni Dome	10 516	3 206	1925	H.G. Botha-Reid and party*	A

Peak	Height		Date of First Ascent	Climbing Party	Standard of Climb
	Feet	Metres			
Injisuthi Buttress	10 503	3 202	1935	G.M.J. Sweeney, M. Frank	C
Western Triplet	10 455	3 187	1951	R.F. Davies, D. Bell	G
Sentinel	10 385	3 165	1910	W.J. Wybergh, Lieut. N.M. McLeod	D
Cockade	10 368	3 161	1936	O.B. Godbold and party*	A
North Saddle	10 346	3 153	1968	R. Fuggle, C. Fatti, B. Manicom, A. Dick, from Ntonjelana Valley	F
			1924	O.K. Williamson, D.W. Bassett-Smith	C
Cathkin Peak	10 330	3149	1912	G.T. Amphlett, W.C. West, Fr A.D. Kelly, T. Casement, Tobias, Melatu	E
Mount Amery	10 311	3 143	1955	E.M. Winter, R.M. Moor, M.C. Moor, from ubuSingatha Valley	D
			1920	D.W. Bassett-Smith, R.G. Kingdon	B
Eastern Triplet	10 309	3 143	1950	E. Scholes, R. Forsyth, D. Watkins, Lorna Pierson	G
Beacon Buttress	10 240	3 121		No record*	A
South Saddle	10 234	3 120	1947	J. de V. Graaff*	D
uMponjwana	10 224	3 117	1946	G. Thomson, K. Snelson	E
Elephant	10 198	3 109	1936	O.B. Godbold and party*	A
Outer Mnweni Pinnacle	10 165	3 099	1948	G. Thomson, C. Gloster	G
Inner Mnweni Pinnacle	10 155	3 096	1949	J. de V. Graaff, G.R. de Carle, R. Buckland, Phyllis Goodwin	E
Abbey	10 134	3 089		No record*	A
uMbundini Buttress	10 132	3 089		No record*	A
Mount Oompie	10 116	3 084	1930	H.A. Liddle, C.Heron, A.G. Bird	C
Didima Dome	10 096	3 078	1935	O.B. Godbold, E.S. Field*	A
Little Saddle	10 089	3 075	1935	D.P. Liebenberg, S. Rose, Dr L.P. Ripley, H.J. Barker	B
Windsor Castle	10 055	3 065	1935	D.P. Liebenberg, S.Rose, Dr L.P. Ripley, H.J. Barker	B
Witch	10 045	3 062	1935	O.B. Godbold, E.S. Field and party	C
Castle Buttress	10 015	3 053		No record*	A
Eastern Buttress	9 996	3 047	1914	Fr A.D. Kelly, G.J. Miller	D
The Ape	9 990	3 045		No record*	A
Inner Tower	9 986	3 044	1913	Fr A.D. Kelly, G.J. Miller*	C

PEAK	HEIGHT		DATE OF FIRST ASCENT	CLIMBING PARTY	STANDARD OF CLIMB
	FEET	METRES			
South Ifidi Pinnacle	9 950	3 033	1952	E.M. Winter, Gillian Bettle	D
North Ifidi Pinnacle	9 950	3 033	1959	E.M. Winter, M.C. Moor	F
Rockeries Peak	9 930	3 027	1953	R.F. Davies, J. de V. Graaff, J. Slinger, D. Williamson	F
uMbundini Fangs	9 920	3 024	1953	T.C. Norcott, H.A. Cockburn, M. Allan	E
Mitre	9 919	3 023	1938	O.B. Godbold, L. Bybee and party	E
Devil's Tooth	9 902	3 019	1950	E.H. Scholes, D. Bell, P. Campbell	G
Inner Horn	9 858	3 005	1925	H.G. Botha-Reid and party	C
Outer Horn	9 856	3 005	1934	D.P. Liebenberg, Dr L.P. Ripley, H.G. Botha-Reid, T. Wood, F.S. Brown	D
Cathedral Peak	9 856	3 004	1917	D.W. Bassett-Smith, R. G. Kingdon	C
Ntonjelana Needle	9 800	2 987	1934	O.B. Godbold, F.E. Ellis, N. Hodson	D
Old Woman Grinding Corn	9 798	2 986	1937	O.B. Godbold, C.E. Axelson, N. Hodson	E
Sterkhorn (South)	9 755	2 973	1888	Rev A.H. Stocker, R.F. Stocker	E
Amphitheatre Wall	9 750	2 972	1935	D.P. Liebenberg, Mary Lear, Aimee Netter, M. Frank	E
Saddle (Centre)	9 750	2 972	1934	O.B. Godbold, F.E. Ellis	C
Cikicane	9 700	2 957	1958	Dr S.H. Ripley, E.M. Winter, J. Grindley	E
Middle Triplet	9 663	2 946	1950	D. Watkins, Gillian Bettle, Lorna Pierson	F
Bell	9 612	2 930	1944	Hans and Else Wong	E
Column	9 597	2 926	1945	G. Thomson	F
Pyramid	9 558	2 914	1936	K.F. Howes-Howell, B. Godbold, H.C. Hoets, C. Axelson, S.Rose, Naomi Bokenham	E
Inner Mnweni Needle	9 532	2 905	1943	A.S. Hooper, P.B. Fenger, Elizabeth Burton	D
Twins	9 510	2 899	1931	G.M. Sweeney and party	C
Outer Mnweni Needle	9 483	2 890	1921	K. Cameron, D.W. Bassett-Smith	D
Litter	9 181	2 799	1935	D.P. Liebenberg, S.Rose, Dr L.P. Ripley, H.J. Barker, Mary Lear, Rene Hodson	D
Turret	8 758	2 670	1933	O.B. Godbold, F.E. Ellis and party	B
Amphlett	8 597	2 620	1933	O.B. Godbold, F.E. Ellis and party	C
			1912	possibly ascended by G.T. Amphlett	C
Eastman's Peak	8 466	2 580	1935	H.A. Eastman and party	C
Gatberg	7 900	2 408	1910	W. Carter Robinson, M.E. Robinson	B

Peak	Height		Date of First Ascent	Climbing Party	Standard of Climb
	Feet	Metres			
The following two peaks have not been included in the above list. They are on the Lesotho side of the watershed, and are, therefore, not true Drakensberg Peaks					
Thabana Ntlenyana (highest peak in Africa south of Kilimanjaro)	11 425	3 482	1951	D. Watkins, B. Anderson, R. Goodwin and party*	A
Makheke	11 355	3 461	1938	J. van Heyningen, Col. Park Gray* (but height had already been computed, presumably by aneroid, in 1888, so this could not have been a first ascent)	A

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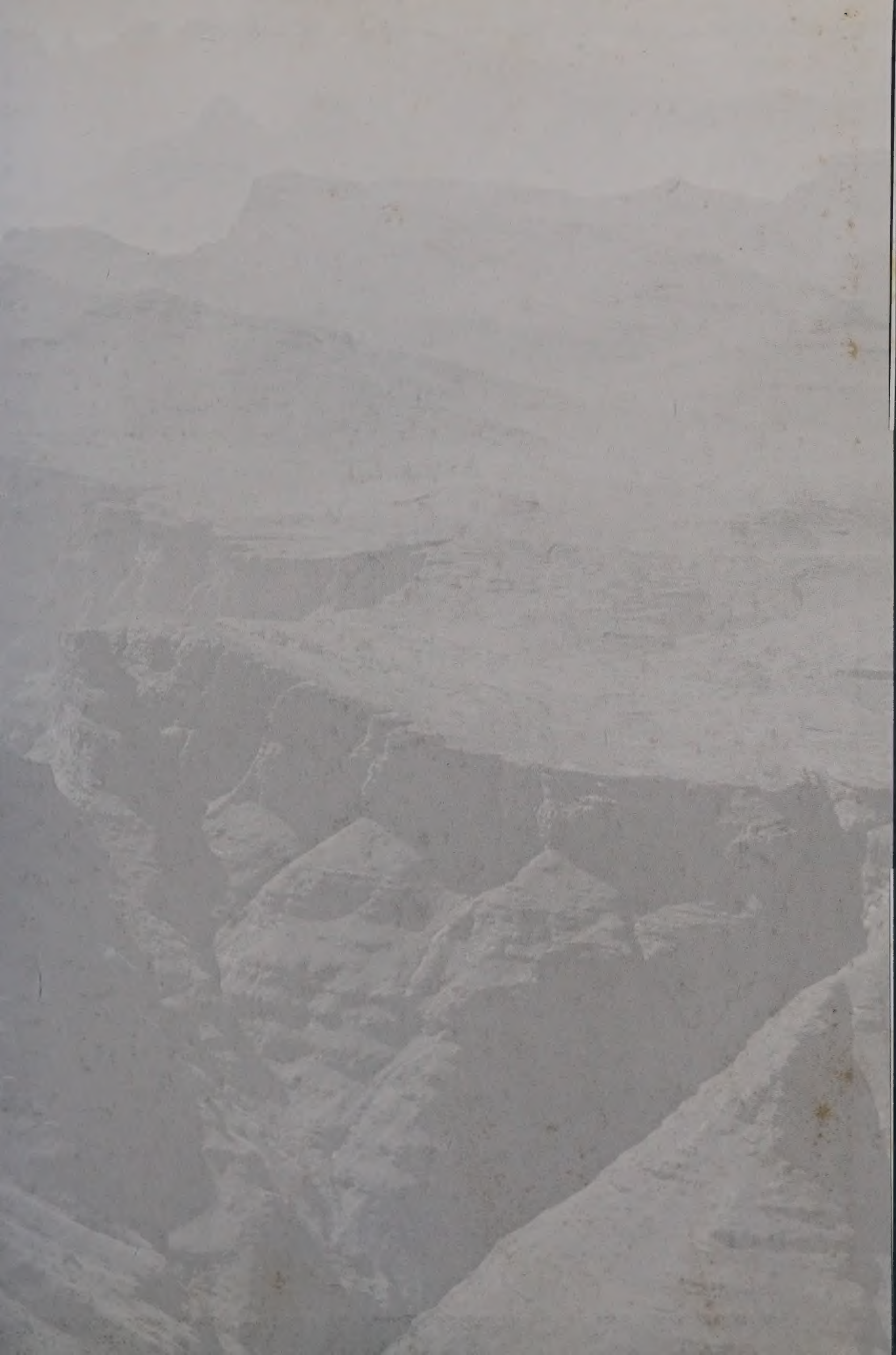

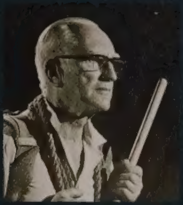

R.O. Pearse was headmaster at Estcourt High School for 25 years before retiring to live in the mountains he loved. There he started a second and even more successful career as an author, with *Barrier of Spears* (1973), *Mountain Splendour* (1978), *Joseph Baynes, Pioneer* (1985) and *Dragon's Wrath* (1986), with James Byrom. A biography of Reg Pearse is included for the first time in this edition.

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Malcolm L. Pearse is acknowledged as one of the foremost outdoor photographers in the country. He was awarded an Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain in 1978. Not only has he illustrated this book, his photographs have appeared in his father's other Drakensberg books, and in his own *Camera in Quathlamba* (Howard Timmins, 1981). He now operates an outdoor adventure company, *Summit Ventures*.

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